CLASSICOLOURS

LUFTWAFFE COLOURS
Volume Three Section 1

JAGDWAFFE

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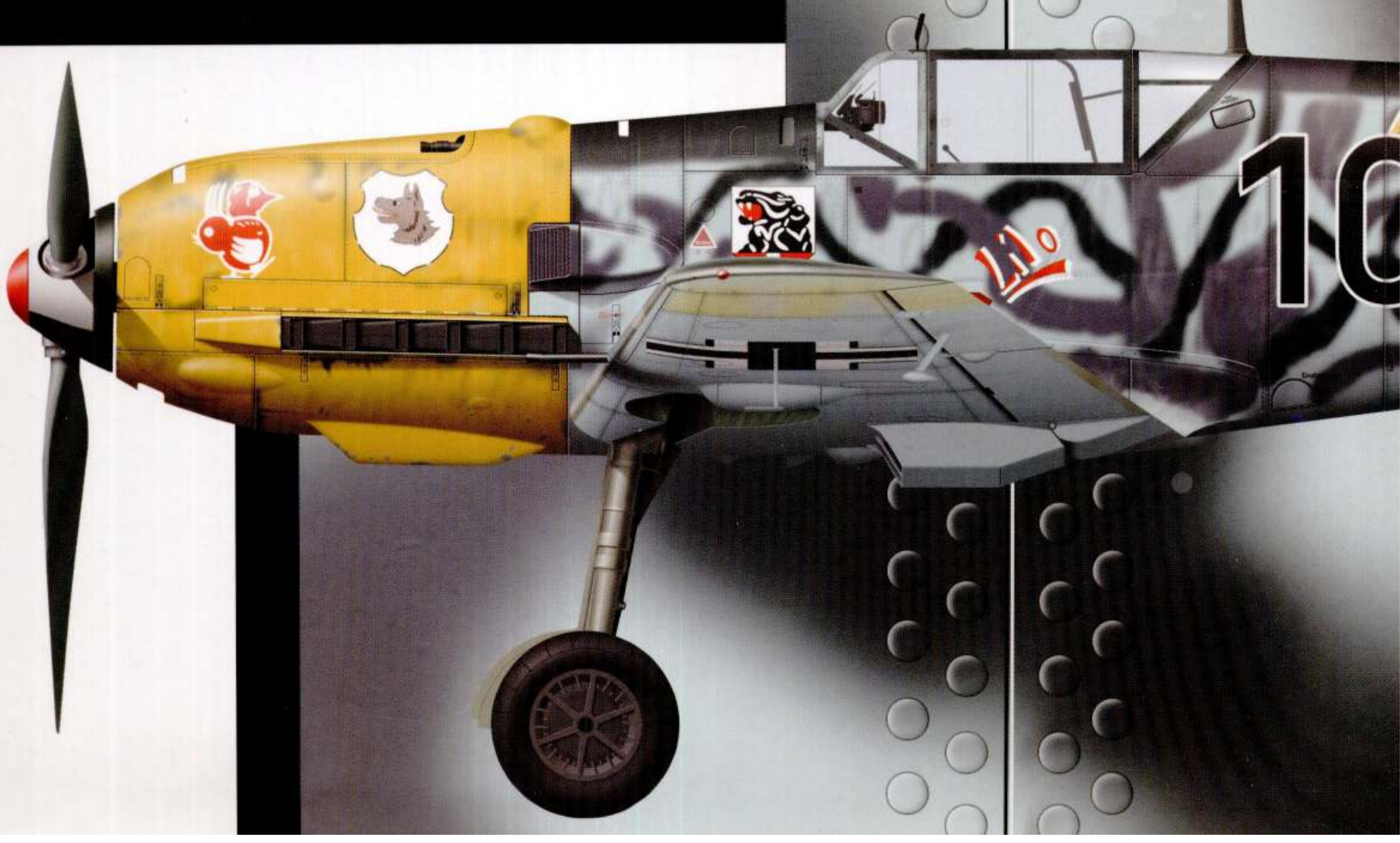
STRIKE IN THE BALKANS

April-May 1941



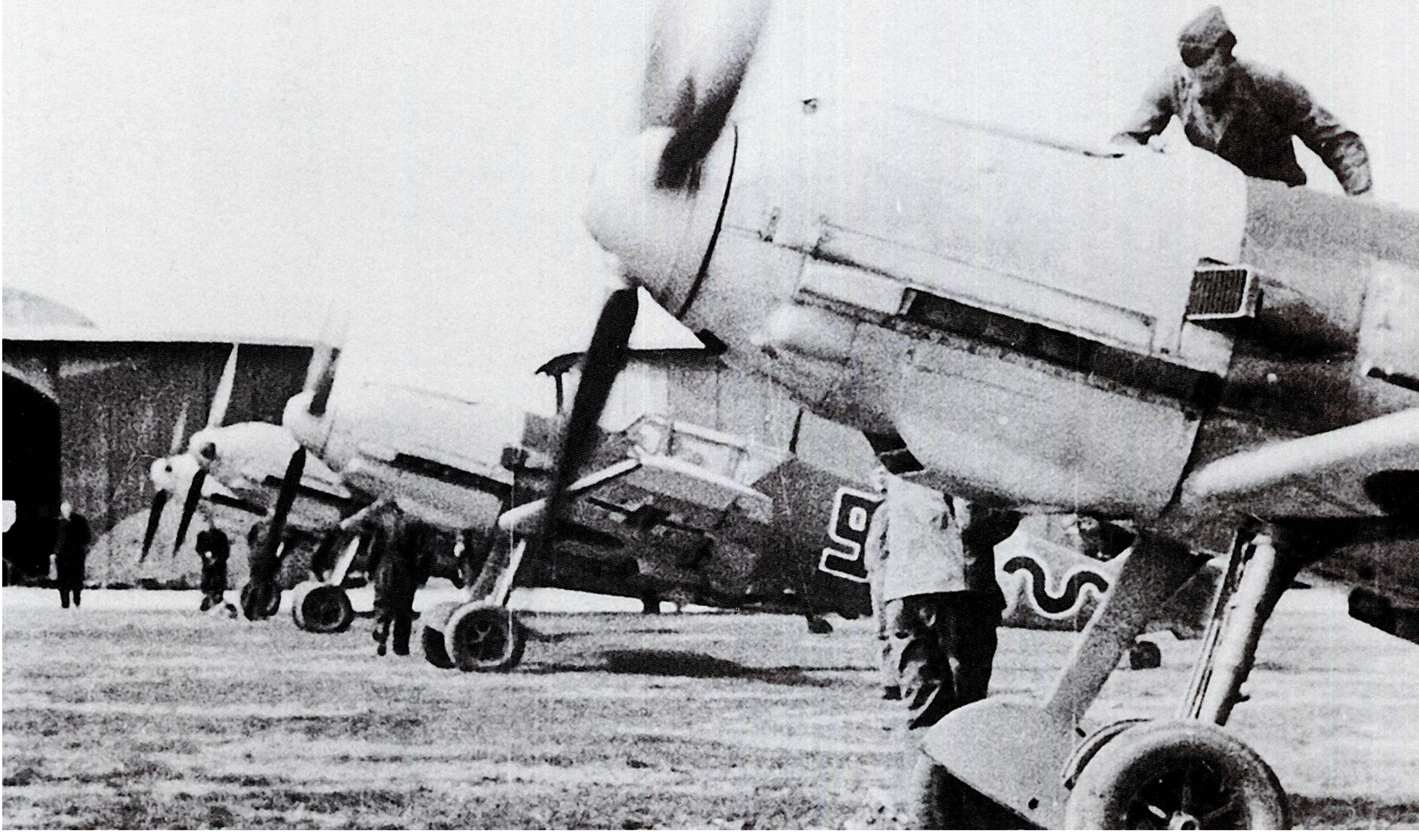
1941

STRIKE IN THE BALKANS

1. *The outcome of the battles in Albania is still uncertain. In the light of the threatening situation in Albania it is doubly important to frustrate English efforts to establish, behind the protection of a Balkan front, an air base which would threaten Italy in the first place and, incidentally, the Rumanian oil fields.*

2. *My **intention** is therefore -*
   (a) To establish in the coming months a constantly increasing force in Southern Rumania.
   (b) On the arrival of favourable weather - probably in March - to move this force across Bulgaria to occupy the north coast of the Aegean and, should this be necessary, the entire mainland of Greece ('Operation Marita'). We can rely upon Bulgarian support.

Adolf Hitler
Extract from Directive No.20, 'Operation Marita'
13 December 1940



'Marita'

During the Spring and early Summer of 1940, Hitler, although preoccupied with his offensives in Western Europe, was already making plans for an attack on Russia. He was therefore anxious to avoid becoming involved in any other conflict which might delay his offensive into Russia, but in September 1940, Germany's unpredictable ally Mussolini staged an unsuccessful attack from the Italian colony of Libya against British-occupied Egypt and, moreover, had already spoken to Hitler about an attack by Italy against Greece. By trying every means to maintain a balance in the Mediterranean, Hitler succeeded for a while in restraining Mussolini from opening this front while he, Hitler, tried to transform the Balkans into a satellite region by peaceful diplomacy.

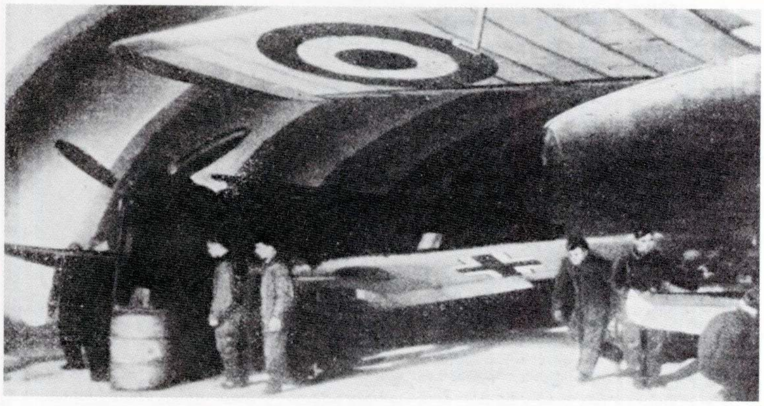
The Balkans interested Hitler greatly. The reason, quite apart from his planned attack on Russia, was Germany's great dependence upon Rumania for oil. At that time, the Rumanian oil fields were safely beyond the range of the nearest RAF aircraft, the closest being stationed in Palestine and Egypt, but if British forces moved into Greece, ostensibly to assist the Greeks in any war against Italy, that would place the oil fields within range of the RAF's bombers.

LEFT: King Michael of Rumania surrounded by high-ranking German and Rumanian officers and officials during a parade in Bucharest, Autumn 1940.

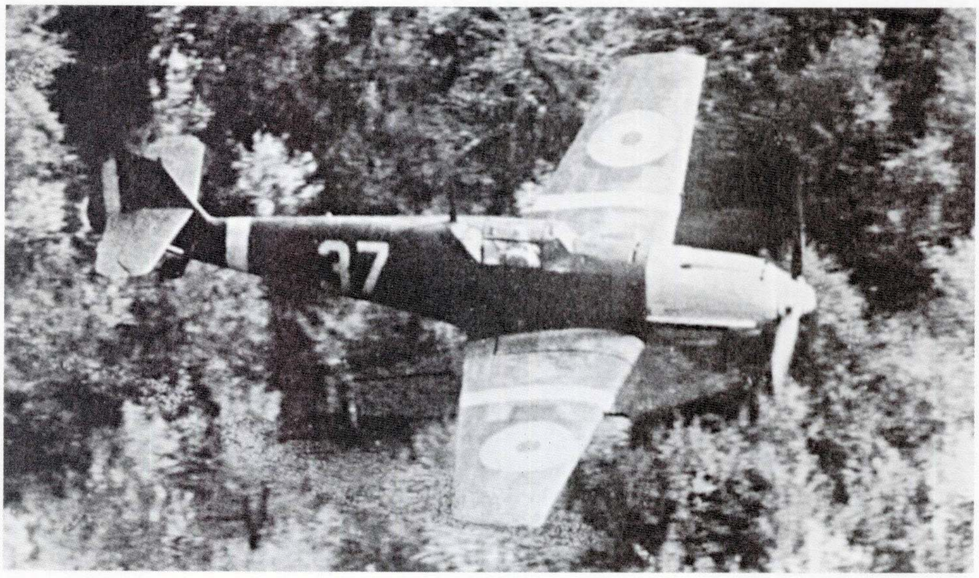
Mussolini, however, already jealous of Hitler's successes in the West, decided to show that his army was equally capable of quick victories and, without revealing details of his plan to the *Führer*, decided to attack Greece. After concentrating an army on Greece's Albanian border, Mussolini demanded the passage of Italian troops to unspecified points in Greece and on 28 October, without waiting for a reply, ordered his forces to cross the border. However, the Greek army proved stronger than anticipated and, after initial successes, the *Regia Esercito* was halted and then pushed back into Albania. By the end of 1940, the Greeks had advanced well into Albania and by March 1941 almost half the country was in Greek hands.

Meanwhile, by 3 November, just five days after the Italian invasion of Greece, small British detachments had, exactly as Hitler feared, already landed on Crete. Any further encroachment by the British into Northern Greece was at first prevented by the Greek Prime Minister, General Ioannis Metaxas, who refused Britain's offer to send troops to mainland Greece for fear of creating a rift with Hitler, whose help he now needed to secure some compromise with Italy.

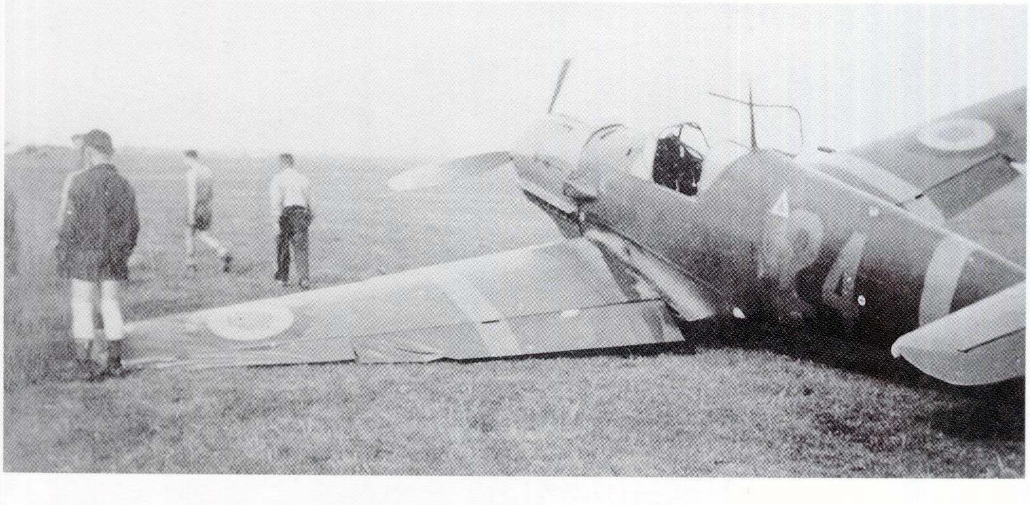
On 10 December, to assist Italy without embarrassing Mussolini, X. *Fliegerkorps* under *General der Flieger* Hans Ferdinand Geisler was sent to Sicily for operations against British ships passing between



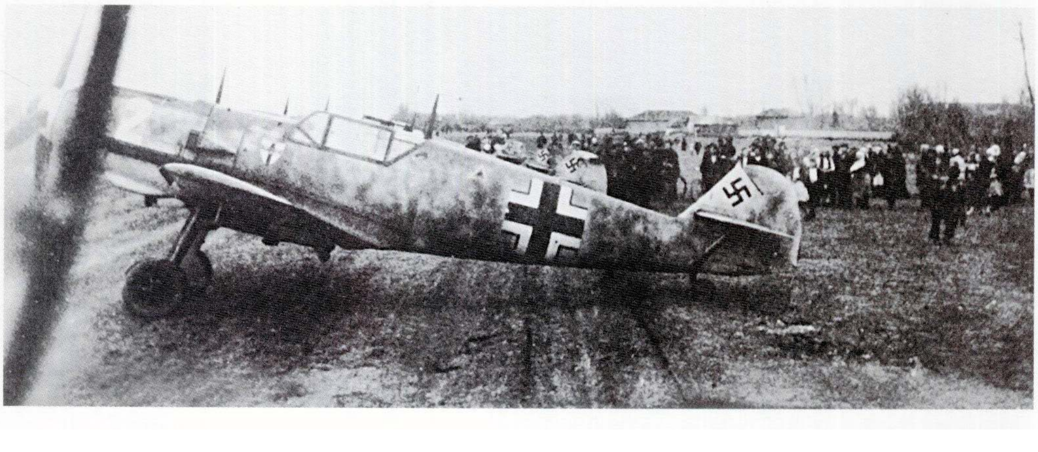
LEFT: Luftwaffe Bf 109 Es sharing a hangar with Rumanian aircraft, early 1941.

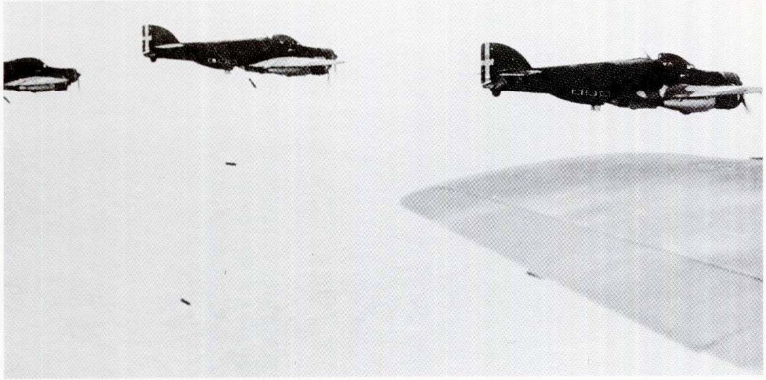


RIGHT AND BELOW: Rumanian Bf 109s of Grupul 7, still with the early red, yellow and blue roundels. In mid-May 1941, the Rumanian national insignia was replaced with the 'Michael's Cross' which continued to be used until late August 1944 when the Rumanians joined the Allies and reverted to use of the roundel. Note also the narrow yellow bands on the wings and rear fuselage.



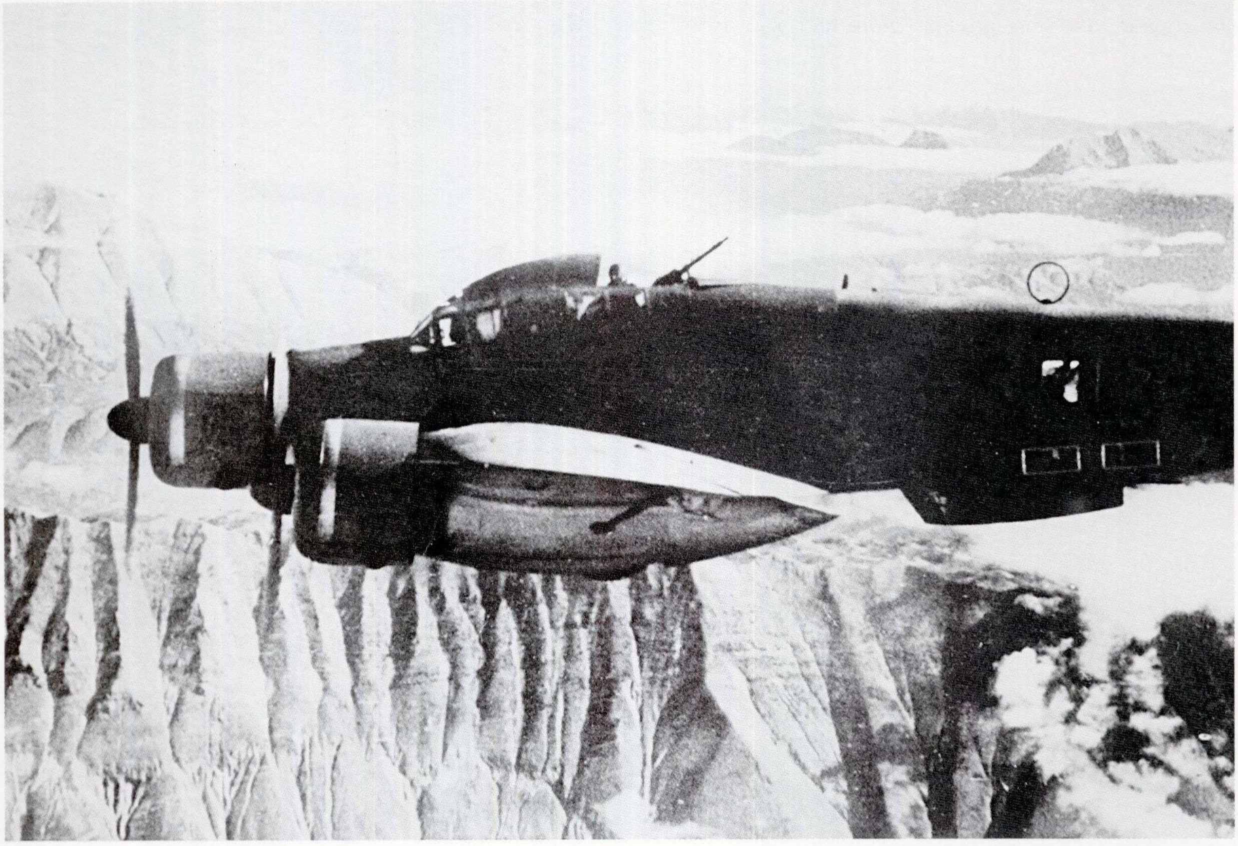
BELOW: 'White 2' of 7./JG 27 was photographed in Rumania in February 1941 and carries a single black victory bar on the tail in front of the Hakenkreuz. At this time, the entire III./JG 27 was based at Bucharest-Giulesti.





ABOVE AND BELOW: SM.79s of the Regia Aeronautica during their attacks against Greece.

ABOVE: Bruno Mussolini, one of the Duce's sons, returning from a mission over Greece.



BELOW: Italian infantrymen advancing from Albania into Greece and (*BELOW RIGHT*) Italian mountain artillery firing at Greek positions.

Sicily and the North African coast. Three days later, however, on hearing of the Italian defeats in Greece and North Africa, Hitler decided that, with suitable weather in the Spring of 1941, German forces would invade and secure Greece. To attack Greece, however, Hitler would need to cross Rumanian and Bulgarian territory, and in November 1940, he therefore brought Rumania and Hungary into the Axis alliance, followed in March 1941 by Bulgaria. Hitler's Directive No. 20, Operation *'Marita'*, already called for German troops in southern Rumania to move through Bulgaria, occupy the north coast of the Aegean and, if necessary, occupy the entire mainland of Greece.

Italian operations in Greece were slowed by the Winter, but when the fighting was renewed on 9 March 1941, the Italians again lost more ground. There had also been other Italian defeats elsewhere. In Libya, Commonwealth troops under General Sir Archibald Wavell had pushed the Italians back and advanced the front 500 miles before halting on 9 February, and on 28 March the Royal Navy inflicted heavy losses on the Italian fleet during the battle of Cape Matapan.

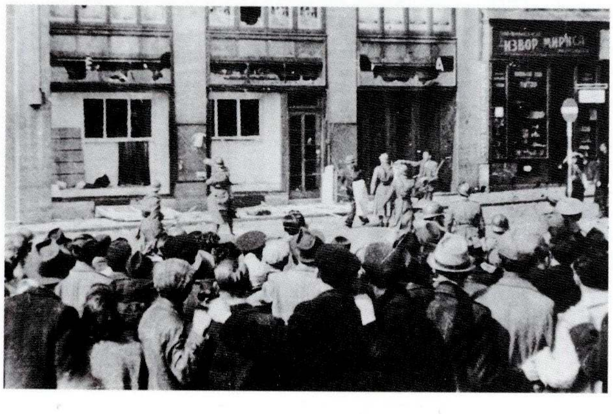
When the Greek Prime Minister Metaxas died on 29 January 1941, he was replaced by Alexandros Koryzis, a weak leader and politician who was unable to resist British pressure for increased support in Greece. As a result of their victories in North Africa, the British could now spare more forces for Greece and, beginning on 7 March, an expeditionary force composed largely of Australian and New Zealand troops began to disembark in Piraeus Harbour. For Hitler there was now no doubt that the RAF would soon be establishing air bases in the north of Greece, so placing the Rumanian oil fields within range of its bombers. With the exception of Yugoslavia, Hitler had now succeeded by political means in isolating Greece from her neighbours. In March, Yugoslavia announced that it, too, wished to join the Axis alliance and on the 25th signed the Tripartite Pact with Hitler.

Within Yugoslavia, however, the Slovenian and particularly the Serbian population were opposed to the Pact. Many Serbs suspected that Germany would soon clash with Russia and, as they had fought with the Russians during the First World War, considered Russia a natural ally to be supported against Germany. Following a day of unrest throughout Yugoslavia and riots in the capital, a well-planned anti-German coup on the night of 26/27 March overthrew the regime of Prince Paul and rejected the German alliance. Despite assurances of continued loyalty, Hitler was suspicious of the new Yugoslav government which he viewed as unreliable and likely to jeopardise both *'Marita'* and *'Barbarossa'*. Hitler could afford no such risks and decided to attack Yugoslavia at once and dismantle the state. The operation would be synchronised with *'Marita'*, the attack already planned on Greece.

The original German plans for *'Marita'* were now quickly revised, redrafted and issued as War Directive No. 26, dated 3 April, which called for Rumania, Bulgaria and Hungary to support a German invasion of Yugoslavia and Greece. All was ready in three days. The new *Blitzkrieg* would begin on 6 April.

ABOVE: In response to an invitation from Adolf Hitler, the Yugoslav Prime Minister Dr. Dragisha Tsvetkovitch and his Foreign Minister, Dr. Cincar-Markovitch, arrived at Berchtesgaden on 14 February 1941 to discuss Yugoslavia joining the Axis Tripartate Pact. Here, Hitler is seen with Tsvetkovitch (carrying hat) and Cincar-Markovitch (just behind), while on the right is Joachim von Ribbentrop and an interpreter. Although the Pact was signed soon afterwards, it was destined not to be ratified and after the Yugoslav coup d'état on 27 March the two signatories were arrested.

BELOW LEFT AND RIGHT: Scenes in Belgrade during demonstrations protesting at the signing of the Tripartite Pact. Following a coup led by the Yugoslav Air Force Chief of Staff, General Duson Simonovic, the agreement was repudiated.



"...there was no throttle!"

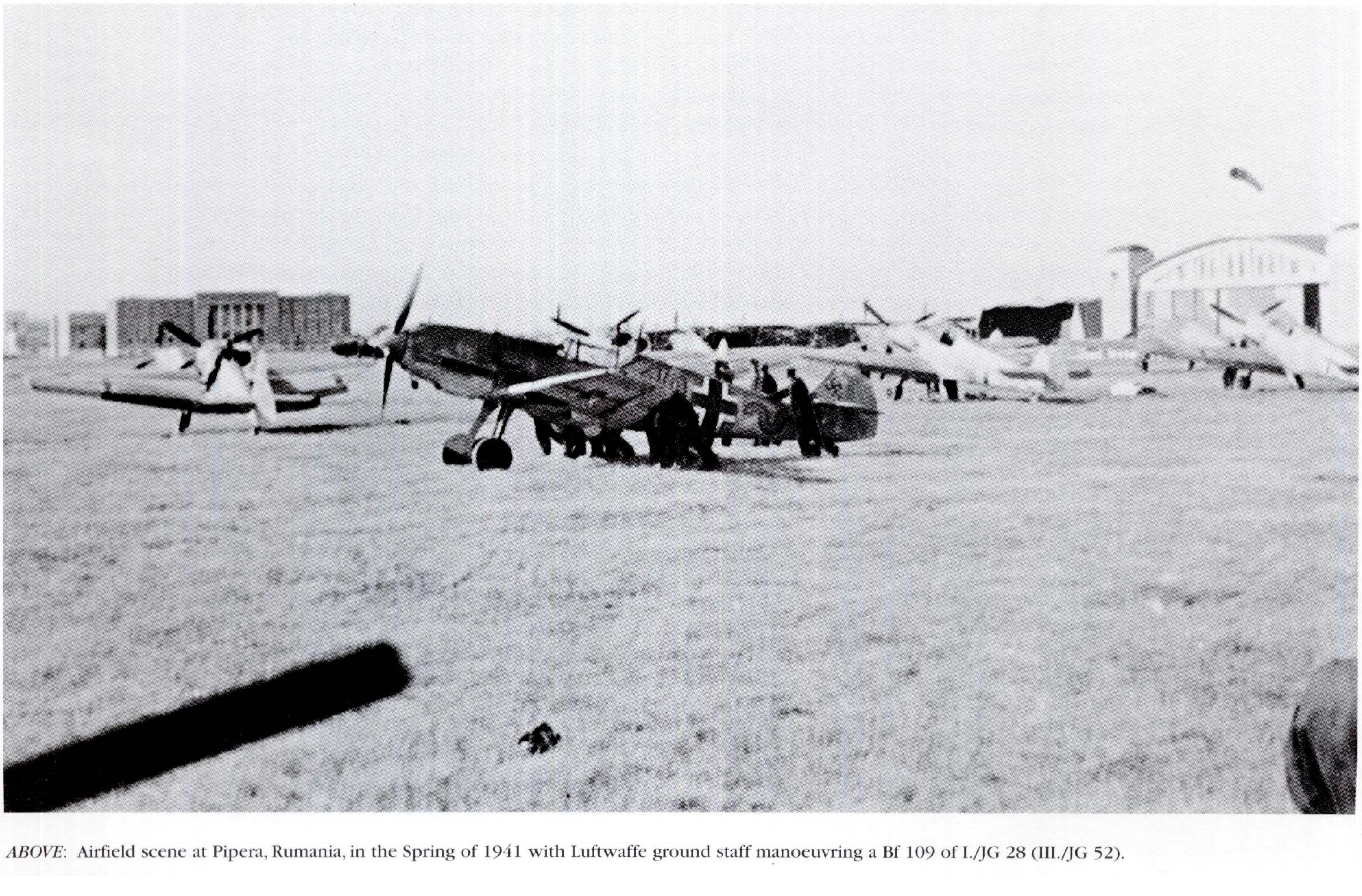
Hannes Trautloft, Kommodore of JG 54

During the Balkans campaign, the '*Green Hearts*' *Geschwader*, then stationed at Belgrade-Semlin, was withdrawn from combat operations. Before our aircraft were passed on to another unit, the ground personnel did their best to bring them up to first-class condition and parked them around the edge of the airfield. Until they took delivery of new aircraft, the '*Green Hearts*' therefore led a peaceful existence and each person used his free time in his own way. For the pilots, this involved some high-performance Yugoslav gliders which they had found in a hangar and had made ready to fly. Thus, every Friday, while the war raged elsewhere, such famous glider pilots as Wolfgang Späte, Franz Eckerle, and 'Hubs' Mütherich performed their masterly aerobatics displays over the Semlin air base. These so impressed me that I decided I wanted to take part so, one Friday, 'Hubs' Mütherich gave me the necessary instruction, a Go 145 tow-plane was coupled up to the glider, and off I went.

At first everything proceeded smoothly. Then, at a height of 1,000 metres, as I banked the glider into a turn, I saw below me a Do 17 which had carried out an emergency landing in one of the tributaries of the River Danube which ran close to the airfield. Fascinated, and purely out of habit, I rolled the glider upside down to take a better look at the crash-landed Dornier. This cost me a considerable loss in height, but I was so engrossed that it was only as I automatically reached for the throttle that I realised that I, the experienced fighter pilot, was not seated in my Bf 109 and that there was no throttle!

Struggling to return to the airfield in a shallow glide, I saw before me, as if forming a barrier, the proud lines of Bf 109s which the ground personnel had so carefully serviced. The whole *Geschwader* was watching and a collision seemed inevitable, but I pushed the stick forward and hoped for the best. The nose dropped and the glider picked up a little speed, but I was still heading straight towards the parked Bf 109s. I hauled back on the stick and the glider staggered to a height of three metres, rose over the parked aircraft - and stalled.

The glider fell like a stone. There was a loud crash as it broke apart, losing its canopy and wings. I sat in the wreckage surprised but uninjured until one of the workshop foremen arrived and, anxious to be helpful, set about freeing me from the smashed remains. However, he clearly had not recognised me as the *Geschwader Kommodore*, for as he pulled away the splintered wood and torn fabric, I heard him dryly remark, *"I should have known! Bloody Friday again!"*



ABOVE: Airfield scene at Pipera, Rumania, in the Spring of 1941 with Luftwaffe ground staff manoeuvring a Bf 109 of I./JG 28 (III./JG 52).

The German Forces

Although a decision had already been reached on which German forces would be required to take part in the original Operation *'Marita'* - the invasion only of Greece - the events in Yugoslavia now demanded that new units had to be moved from the West and KG 2, JG 77 and I.(*J*)/LG 2 were selected to operate against the Yugoslav "traitors". On the evening of 27 March, I. and III./KG 2, then based in Cambrai and Merville respectively, were ordered to move to Austria the following day .[1] As effective opposition was not expected, the fighter units assigned to the campaign were those still equipped with the E series of the Bf 109, and on 30 March, II. and III./JG 77 and I.(J)/LG 2 left their bases in France and transferred first to Vienna, II. and III./JG 77 later moving on to Deta, in Rumania, and I.(J)/LJ 2 to Radomir in Bulgaria..

The following table shows the situation of *Luftwaffe* units on 5 April 1941. The bomber units, possessing the greatest range, were stationed at Vienna in Austria, while the shorter-range Stukas were dispersed at Graz near the border between Austria and Yugoslavia, and also in the Banat area of Arad in Rumania and Deta in Bulgaria. All the dive-bomber units were assigned fighter units to provide escort and cover.

Luftwaffe Units allocated to 'Marita', 5 April 1941

Luftflottenkommando 4	Vienna	*General der Flieger* Alexander Löhr
I. & III./KG 2, III./KG 3, II./KG 4, KG 51, 4.(*F*)/121		
Fliegerführer Graz	Graz	*Obstlt.* Torsten Christ
Stab/St.G. 3 and II./St.G. 77		
Stab/JG 54	Graz-Thalerhof	*Major* Hannes Trautloft
II./JG 54 (less 4./JG 54)	Graz-Thalerhof	*Hptm.* Dietrich Hrabak
I./JG 27	Graz-Thalerhof	*Hptm.* Eduard Neumann
Fliegerführer Arad	Arad	*Obstlt.* Clemens Graf von Schönborn-Wiesentheid
Stab, I. and III./St.G. 77		
I./ZG 26		
III./JG 54	Arad	*Hptm.* Arnold Lignitz
4./JG 54	Arad	*Oblt.* Hans Philipp
Stab/JG 77	Deta	*Major* Bernhard Woldenga
II./JG 77	Deta	*Hptm.* Franz-Heinz Lange
III./JG 77	Deta	*Major* Alexander von Winterfeldt
VIII. Fliegerkorps	Gorna Djumaja	*General der Flieger* Wolfram von Richthofen
Stab, I. & III./St.G. 2; I./St.G. 3; I./St.G. 1		
II.(*S*)/LG 2 and 10./LG 2		
II./ZG 26		
2.(*F*)/11 & 7.(*F*)/LG 2		
Stab/JG 27	Belica	*Major* Wolfgang Schellmann
II./JG 27	Vrba	*Hptm.* Wolfgang Lippert
III./JG 27	Belica	*Hptm.* Max Dobislav
I.(*J*)/LG 2	Radomir	*Hptm.* Herbert Ihlefeld
Deutsche Luftwaffe Mission in Rumania	Bucharest	*Gen.Lt.* Hans Speidel
I./JG 28 (III./JG 52)	Pipera	*Major* Gotthard Handrick

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[1] II./KG 2 was at that time converting to the Do 217 in Germany.

"I saw the Rumanian CO slap one of his pilots across the face..."

KURT SCHADE, I./JG 28 AND III./JG 52

I was born on 23 May 1918 and entered the *Luftkriegsschule* at Fürstenbeldbruck at the end of 1937. This was followed by fighter pilot training at the *Jagdschule* Schleissheim, where I started on 1 September 1939 with great impatience as I wanted to fly at the front as soon as possible. I was therefore delighted when, just three months later, on 6 December 1939, I received my certificate. I was then posted to the newly-created *Ergänzungs-Jagdgruppe* Merseburg where, to my intense disappointment, I had to remain until March 1940 lecturing newcomers on various courses while my comrades were posted to operational units.

Finally, on 18 March, I was posted to 9./JG 2, the '*Richthofen*' *Geschwader*, as Technical Officer. I arrived in time to participate in the early part of the Western campaign but on 6 June, during a fight with six Curtiss fighters, my aircraft was shot down. I baled out, but my parachute did not open properly and I was severely injured when I hit the ground. Consequently, I was hospitalised until 29 September 1940, after which I went back to the EJG Merseburg where I met *Major* Gotthard Handrick.

At the end of October, I had to take a Bf 108 and fly *Major* Handrick's luggage and his dog to Berlin-Schönwalde where he was going to take over III./JG 52 from *Major* Alexander von Winterfeldt. My mission completed, I flew back to Merseburg the next day and was eating in the *Kasino* [1] when I received a telegram: *"Lt. Schade posted to I./JG 28. Present yourself to Luftgaukommando Wien."* I was most surprised, as I had never heard of I./JG 28, and I was also disappointed that my efforts to return to JG 2 had failed.

Taking the next Ju 52 to Vienna, I was then ordered on to Bucharest-Pipera where I was surprised to find *Major* Handrick again. He was the *Kommandeur* of I./JG 28 and appointed me the *Gruppe Nachrichten Offizier*.[2] At that time the unit comprised only the *Stab* and 3./JG 28 commanded by *Oblt*. Franz Hörnig. We had 16 Bf 109s and 135 men. The 7. *Staffel* under *Hptm*. Erwin Bacsila, and 8./JG 52 under *Oblt*. Günther Rall, joined us at the end of December.

Our task was to teach Rumanian pilots how to fly the Bf 109. They were generally good pilots, even if their personal conduct was different than ours. One day, for example, I saw the Rumanian CO slap one of his pilots across the face, an action which would, of course, have been unthinkable in the *Luftwaffe*. However, we led a comfortable life as guests of the Rumanians and were treated very well.

On 27 December 1940, I./JG 28 resumed its normal designation of III./JG 52, by which time our *Gruppe* was again at full strength.[3] Later, on 27 April 1941, we received orders to transfer via Salonika and Athens-Tatoi to Molaoi in the Peloponnese where we were to take part in the offensive against Crete. Actually, we took over from another unit which had exhausted itself in the campaign.

Although we had no aerial encounters with the enemy over Crete, our ground-attack missions were very difficult because of the heavy anti-aircraft fire from the Australians and New Zealanders. Nevertheless, we survived without being seriously damaged and, on 10 June, we made the return flight to Bucharest-Pipera. Thus, our involvement in the Balkan campaign was only brief. Soon after our return, *Major* Handrick was promoted to *Kommodore* and handed the *Gruppe* over to *Major* Blumensaat, a former *Lufthansa* pilot. We then transferred to Mizil where we were told about '*Barbarossa*', a new campaign in which we would soon be involved.

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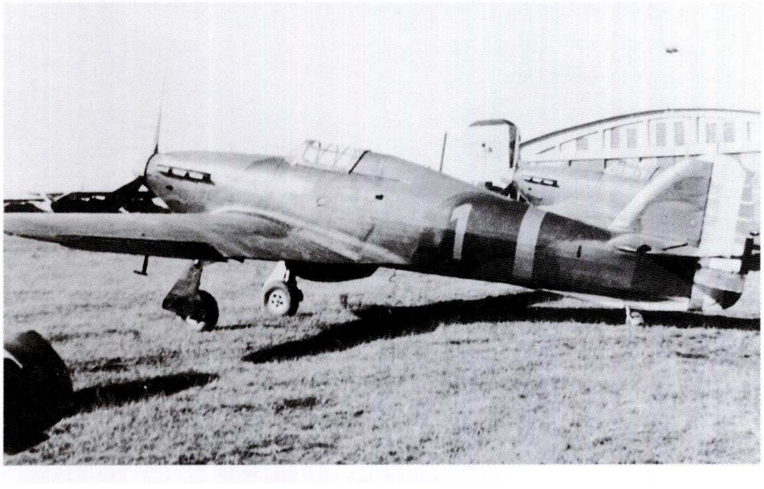
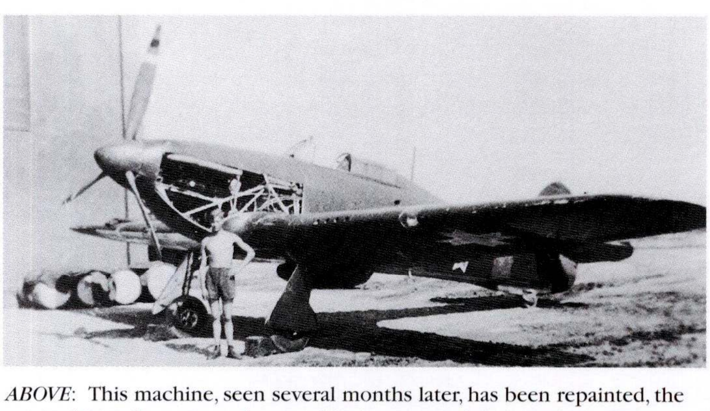
[1] Officers' mess.

[2] Gruppe Communications Officer.

[3] Editor's note: This date cannot be confirmed. PRO file AIR40/2023 shows the designation I./JG 28 still in use in February 1941 and the author believes this cover designation was not dropped until late May. See also Rosch, *Luftwaffe Codes, Markings and Units 1939-1945*, which states that the designation I./JG 28 was used until June.

BELOW: Arriving at Pipera, the German pilots of I./JG 28 were surprised to discover several Royal Rumanian Air Force Hawker Hurricanes which, some months earlier, had been amongst their opponents during the Battle of Britain. In December 1938, Rumania had ordered twelve Hurricane Is which were delivered to Escadrila 53 and numbered 1 to 12.





ABOVE: This machine, seen several months later, has been repainted, the original RAF disruptive scheme of dark green and dark earth on the uppersurfaces in which the aircraft was delivered having been replaced by an overall dark green. Similarly, the early Rumanian roundels have been replaced with the new 'Michael's Cross', first applied in May 1941. Undersurfaces appear to be in the black and white style first introduced in the RAF in September 1938 and still current when the aircraft were delivered. Note that the Rumanian national colours have been applied to the propeller tips. The Luftwaffe would meet the Hurricane again, first in Yugoslavia and later flown by RAF pilots when German forces invaded Greece.

The first day of 'Marita'

The invasion of Greece and Yugoslavia began on 6 April 1941, with support for German ground forces entering Northern Greece being provided by the Bf 109s of II. and III./JG 27 that launched fighter-bomber attacks against Greek positions. In their first encounter, II./JG 27 suffered no losses but III./JG 27 was not so successful. Perhaps because they failed to jettison early enough the bombs carried beneath their Bf 109s, the pilots of 8./JG 27 were unable to evade a fierce, surprise attack by the Hurricanes of 33 Squadron. In the short air battle which ensued, 8. *Staffel* lost four of its eight aircraft. Two pilots were killed, one being *Oblt.* Arno Becker, the *Staffelkapitän*, and two were captured and held prisoner until freed at the end of the campaign. A fifth aircraft also crashed on returning to its base.

The most important assault of the first day, however, took place over Belgrade, the Yugoslav capital, which Hitler had ordered to be punished for its uprising and the nationalism of its inhabitants. Indeed, the code name for this part of the operation was *'Strafgericht'* or *'Punishment Court'*. An hour after the battle in which 8./JG 27 had suffered its casualties, some 200 Ju 87s, He 111s and Do 17s, escorted by about 100 Bf 109s and Bf 110s arrived near Belgrade. The Yugoslav Air Force could only commit 29 Me 109s - the Bf 109 was referred to as the Me 109 in Yugoslavia – and five IK-3s of the 6th Regt. to the capital's defence, the 2nd Regt. being unable to take off due to lack of orders and technical difficulties. The Ikarus IK-3 fighters are believed to have clashed with III./JG 77,

"We left our Bf 109 Es for the Rumanians..."

RICHARD HAUSMANN, 8./JG 54

I was born in January 1911 and spent a great part of my youth in Italy where I was greatly influenced by Roman culture. I took part in the Western campaign with 8./JG 54, commanded by *Oblt.* Leo Eggers, and was based in France from 20 May 1940. Four days later, I shot down a Spitfire near Calais. We stayed in France until 22 June, during which time we flew several missions and accompanied our troops in their advance to the Pas-de-Calais. I was very fond of France and its customs, and would certainly have preferred it if my visit to that country had been for reasons other than military occupation.

We then moved to Soesterberg and Bergen in Holland, where we were based until the beginning of August when we returned to France in order to take part in the Battle of Britain. On 5 August we arrived at Guines and flew a number of bomber escort and *freie Jagd* missions, as well as attacking the RAF's airfields. On 5 September I claimed my second victory, a Hurricane near Ashford and my third, another Hurricane, near Maidstone on 20 October. By this time we were also flying *Jabo* missions but our unit was exhausted and the following day we moved back to Holland. After our arrival, I took over 8./JG 54 as the existing *Staffelkapitän* was suffering from nervous exhaustion and had been posted away to rest.

In early December the whole *Staffel* was ordered to the *Reich* to rest and re-equip, returning to Le Mans, and later Cherbourg, on 4 February 1941. At the end of March, our *Kommodore*, Hannes Trautloft, assembled the *Staffelkapitäne* and told us we were going to move to Rumania. This news was generally well received as the fight against the RAF was costly and our units had again been seriously weakened. Thus we flew eastwards via St. Dizier, Metz, Mannheim, Erding, Parndorf and Kecskemet to Arad.

We arrived in Arad on 4 April in a particularly good frame of mind. We were based on a modern and comfortable air base, the locals made us welcome and we had good food. Indeed, we were pleasantly surprised to find there was no rationing and we enjoyed cooking many interesting dishes, including goose. We also received many visitors, which was something we operational fighter pilots were not used to, but enjoyed.

We took off on our first mission in this new area at 08.10 hrs on 6 April and escorted He 111s to bomb Belgrade. We returned at 09.35 hrs and had the feeling we had participated in something unpalatable. Certainly, I landed feeling uneasy, for I had seen houses burning and was aware of what a catastrophe the raid must have been for the civilians. After the war, *General* Alexander Löhr, who had ordered the attack, was tried and executed, though no one was held to account for the far more destructive USAAF raid which took place later in the war.

The next day we transferred to Pecs, and I was sitting with my *Kommandeur*, *Hptm.* Arnold Lignitz, in a parked Ju 52 when we heard explosions. Two Yugoslav bombers had attacked our new airfield and damaged my Bf 109 E, 'Red 1', W.Nr. 5906. I therefore flew the next missions in 'Red 6' until the 13th when my aircraft was repaired. On that date we moved to Deta, but we did not fly many more missions and at the end of April we were recalled to Germany. We left our Bf 109 Es for the Rumanians and transferred to Stolp-Reitz where the *Gruppe* re-equipped with the Bf 109 F as part of the preparations for the forthcoming *'Operation Barbarossa'*.

I first flew a 'Friedrich', which had a DB 601N engine, on 9 May. The aircraft was coded BI+FS and I was very pleasantly surprised. This variant was fantastic, much better than the 'Emil', and on 20 May, I made my first flight in W.Nr. 6787 which became my new 'Red 1'. We stayed in Stolp-Reitz until 19 June 1941 and then moved to the East where we were to play our part in another episode of the air war.

since *Ofw.* Erwin Riehl of 9./JG 77 claimed one, while the *Staffelkapitän*, *Oblt.* Armin Schmidt, shot down a Yugoslav Me 109. *Oblt.* Erich Friedrich of the *Stab*/JG 77 also claimed an Me 109 and II./JG 77 claimed another seven. Thus, total claims amounted to nine Me 109s and one IK-3 whereas true Yugoslav losses were five aircraft destroyed, six severely damaged and three pilots killed. Once their escort duties were accomplished, the fighters were free to carry out strafing attacks against airfields around the capital, and during these they claimed another six aircraft destroyed.

But Belgrade's suffering was not yet over, and at about 10.00 hrs, 12 Me 109s and three IK-3s of 32nd and 51st Groups took off to counter another Stuka attack. The Ju 87s, from *Stukageschwader* 77, were escorted by III./JG 77, and although the Yugoslavs claimed some victories, they lost one Me 109 to *Lt.* Emil Omert of 8./JG 77 who shot it down while it was landing. This was the first victory for the future *Ritterkreuzträger* who was later killed over Rumania in 1944 while leading III./JG 77.

After refuelling at their bases in Austria, the twin-engined bombers returned in the afternoon and carried out a second and a third attack. They were again escorted by JG 77 and JG 54, but opposition was light and they succeeded in releasing their bombs over their designated target. Meanwhile, three pilots from JG 54, all of whom later became *Ritterkreuzträger*, each claimed an *Abschuss*. *Oblt.* Hans-Ekkehard Bob, *Staffelkapitän* of 9./JG 54, claimed his 20th victory, *Lt.* Max-Hellmuth Ostermann of 7./JG 54 his ninth (and his only Yugoslav *Abschuss*), while *Oblt.* Gerhard Koall, also of 7./JG 54, claimed his first victory. These three claims were all reported as being Me 109s, but correlation with true losses is difficult as the situation was very confused at that time. JG 77 claimed nine aircraft destroyed on the ground but failed to provide precise locations.

By the end of the first day, the main targets in Belgrade had been destroyed. In his post-war memoirs, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill described the German raids as terror attacks and claimed that a greatly inflated figure of 17,000 civilians had been killed by German bombs, but when *Generaloberst* Alexander Löhr, the former commanding officer of *Luftflottenkommando* 4, came before a Titoist court in 1946, the prosecution mentioned a figure of 1,500 Yugoslavs killed. It is believed, however, that the main targets in Belgrade were purely military and, as the Stukas carried out pinpoint attacks and the twin-engined bombers carried only a relatively insignificant load, it is almost certain that even the figure of 1,500 was an exaggeration. However, the post-war Communist government wanted to conduct its own version of the Nuremberg trials and, convicted of atrocities, Alexander Löhr was hanged on 26 February 1947.[2]

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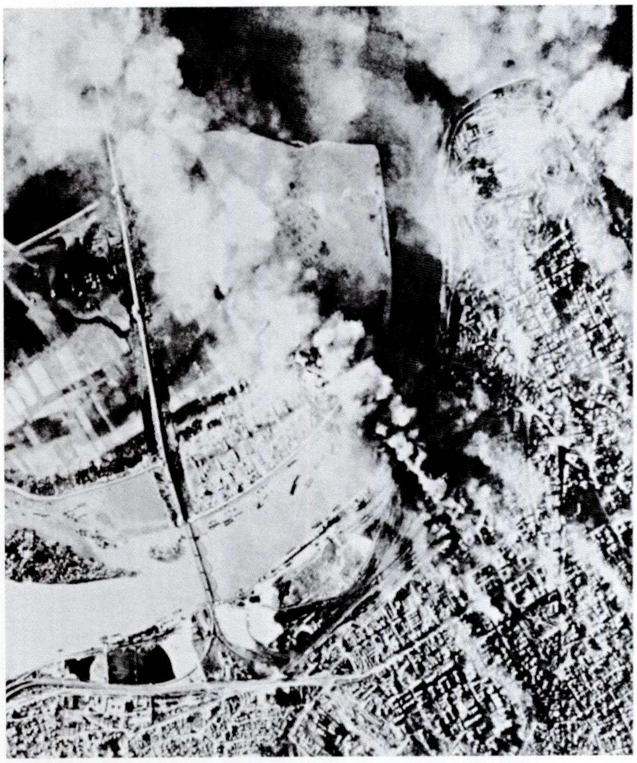
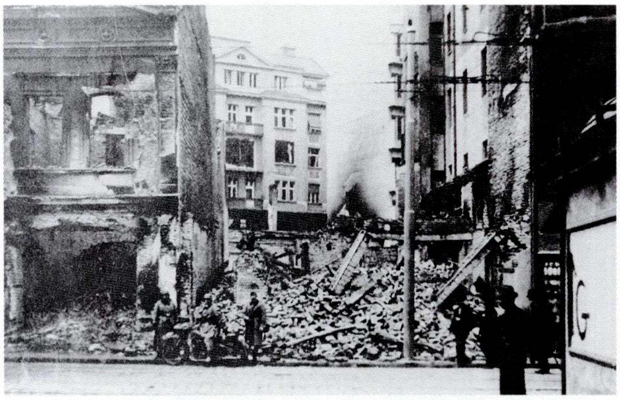
[2] It is to be hoped that, more than 60 years after the event, further research might reveal the true number of casualties.



LEFT, RIGHT AND BELOW: An aerial view of Belgrade (*LEFT*) following the German air attacks on the city during the opening phase of 'Operation Marita'. Other photographs show (*RIGHT*) damage near the administrative sector of the city and (*BELOW*) members of III./JG 54 inspecting destroyed bridges.



"This is Heini. I have been hit!"

HEINZ DEUSCHLE, 6./JG 77

On 6 April 1941, Oblt. Heinz Deuschle was shot down and forced landed his Bf 109 E-7 (W.Nr. 4328) in the area of Pancevo, in Yugoslavia. The following has been taken from a letter to his parents dated 10 April 1941.

When the war against Yugoslavia began, I flew with 500 other aircraft in the first mission to Belgrade. Unfortunately for my score, we did not see any enemy aircraft at the height we were flying, but the scene presented by the bombing of Belgrade disturbed me. The first bombs were released by the Stukas and the explosions enveloped the King's castle in smoke and dust. The following impacts [from the bombers] were like small volcanoes erupting one after the other. These were the "military targets" in the city which soon disappeared amid the flames. When I landed, I was in a rage, very angry at what I had seen.

On the second mission, I again hoped that we might encounter opposition, but once more the only aircraft were German. As we really wanted to have something to shoot at, we dived down and strafed an airfield where we set several aircraft on fire. And then it happened...

I was gaining height again when I heard something hit my aircraft. I had received a direct hit by anti-aircraft fire in my fuel tank. I tried to gain some height and turned for home. I called on the radio: "This is Heini. I have been hit!" The others confirmed they had received my message and said that they could see the fuel leaking from the tank. My aircraft began to lose height and started to smoke. Then my engine stopped and fuel splashed over my face and clothes. I made a successful landing on a piece of ground between two villages, about 20 km north-east of Belgrade. A belly-landing in a field with a burning machine!

I left the aircraft and, as inconspicuously as possible, walked quickly away through the field, trying to think what to do. I wondered if I should, perhaps, hide in a haystack and await nightfall, but within a minute of doing so I climbed out again. It was 13.00 hrs and the sun had made it far too warm in there. I reflected on my situation. The smoke column rising from my machine clearly revealed where I had landed, and after several minutes about ten farmers had gathered round it. I continued to march out of the field, but without apparent haste. Perhaps they would think that the pilot had burned to death in the cockpit. When I was far enough away and could not be seen, I tried as best as I could to make my flying clothes look like civilian dress. The shoulder boards showing my rank went into my pocket and I hid my revolver under my shirt. Whenever people saw me, I pretended to be working in the field and, once they had gone, I started walking again. Despite my caution, however, I almost walked straight into a line of bunkers with Serbian soldiers working in them and was lucky to turn back without being seen.

In the evening, I met a young boy and told him, "I German pilot. Want to go Rumania". He took me to the next farm where I washed and had something to eat and drink. The farmers brought a neighbour who could speak German and he agreed to take me to a village called Mariolana, which was a *Volksdeutsches Dorf* [1] and only 8 km from the Rumanian border...

In this village, I had to explain in great detail what had happened before they started to trust me. But once I had finally gained their confidence, they showed me the many swastika flags they had hidden away, waiting for the arrival of German soldiers...

I was soon helped to reach the border and told my story to the Rumanian authorities who, once again, deeply distrusted me. Nevertheless, I was soon able to convince them of who I was and returned to my unit...

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[1] A village community of people with German origins.

The Yugoslav fighter pilots claimed 22 victories over the Belgrade area against 12 known German losses which comprised four Ju 87s, two Do 17s and six Bf 110s, plus other aircraft damaged. One loss was the Bf 109 E-7 flown by *Oblt.* Heinz Deuschle of 6./JG 77, which was hit by ground fire near Pancevo. *Oblt.* Deuschle, a veteran of II./JG 77, forced landed in enemy territory but avoided being captured and, after he had received help from some *Volksdeutsche* of the Banat, returned to his unit on 9 April.[3]

The Bf 109s of I.(*J*)/LG 2 did not operate over Belgrade on the first day of *'Marita'* as, tactically, the *Gruppe* was subordinated to JG 27 and mainly provided escort for the ground-attack *Gruppe* II.(*Schlacht*)/LG 2 which operated against airfields in the area of Skopje. During its attacks, II.(*Schlacht*)/LG 2 destroyed on the ground 41 Yugoslav Do 17 bombers of the 63rd Group or otherwise put them out of action. Similarly, I.(*J*)/LG 2 was very successful during an engagement with the obsolete Hawker Furies of the 36th Group over the air base of Rezanovacka Kosa. The future *Ritterkreuzträger*, *Lt.* Friedrich Geisshardt of 1./LG 2 claimed his 14th to 17th *Luftsiege* that day and another future *Ritterkreuzträger*, *Oblt.* Erwin Clausen, *Staffelkapitän* of 1./LG 2, was credited with his sixth, seventh and eighth victories. A third pilot of the unit claimed an eighth Fury. At least five aircraft, including two Furies, one Avia BH-33 and an RWD 13 liaison aircraft, were destroyed on the ground, but 6 April exacted a heavy toll on I.(*J*)/LG 2, the *Kommandeur* of which, *Hptm.* Herbert Ihlefeld, was shot down by ground fire south-west of Nisch, probably while flying at very low altitude. He made a good emergency landing but was soon captured by Yugoslav soldiers, mainly Serbians, who were vehemently anti-German. After being badly beaten, he was imprisoned by his captors. Another pilot, *Ofhr.* Heinz Eckardt of 3./LG 2, was shot down by anti-aircraft guns near Komanowo but was killed in the ensuing crash; and a third Bf 109 of I.(*J*)/LG 2 crash-landed at Vrba, the base of II./JG 27, and suffered 45% damage.

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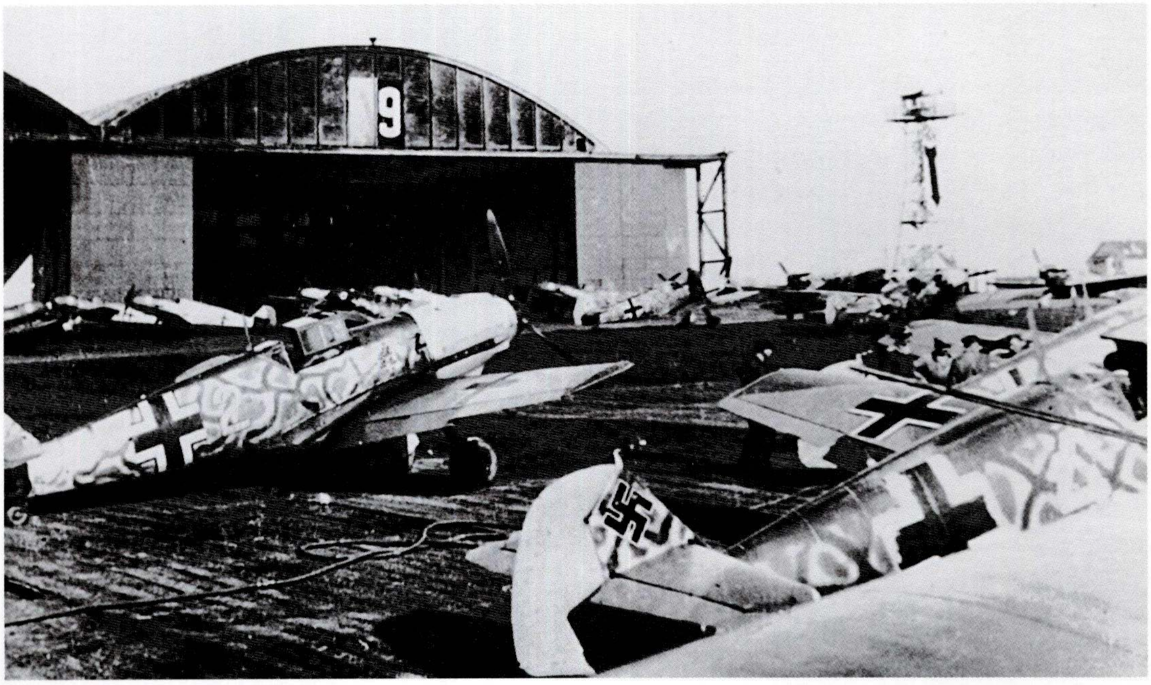
[3] A few weeks later, Deuschle was transferred to I./JG 77 based in Scandinavia. Early in 1942, the *Gruppe* was redesignated I./JG 5 and on 27 May 1944, Deuschle, acting as *Hauptmann beim Stab*, was killed in an air battle over Eastern France.

Meanwhile, in Slovenia, the northern part of Yugoslavia, there was little action. I./JG 27 took off to strafe airfields in the Ljubljana area, 3. *Staffel* attacking Ljubljana airbase during which it destroyed some obsolete Potez 25s on the ground. One young *Oberfähnrich* who fell victim to the anti-aircraft guns but nevertheless succeeded in returning to Graz where he made a belly landing, was Hans-Joachim Marseille, the future 'Star of Africa'. Over Maribor, *Lt.* Willi Kothmann of 2./JG 27 was also hit by anti-aircraft fire and posted missing, although he later rejoined his unit after almost certainly receiving help from friendly *Volksdeutsche*.

Finally, 7./JG 26 was also in action over Yugoslavia. Led by *Oblt.* Joachim Müncheberg, the *Staffel* originally had been detached from its parent *Geschwader* in France to operate from Gela in Sicily against Malta. On 5 April, the day before *'Marita'*, the *Staffel* moved to Taranto and, on the 6th, was ordered to strafe Podgorica airfield. This was not a particularly glorious action as the defence consisted only of two obsolete Avia BH-33s. These aircraft, obviously no match for the Bf 109s, were quickly shot down, Müncheberg claiming one, while the other fell to the guns of *Oblt.* Klaus Mietusch, another future *Ritterkreuzträger*. Both pilots erroneously identified their victims as Furies. Some of the Bf 110s of III./ZG 26, also based in Sicily, were ordered to attack the Mostar area but they, too, carried out only a single mission over Yugoslavia.

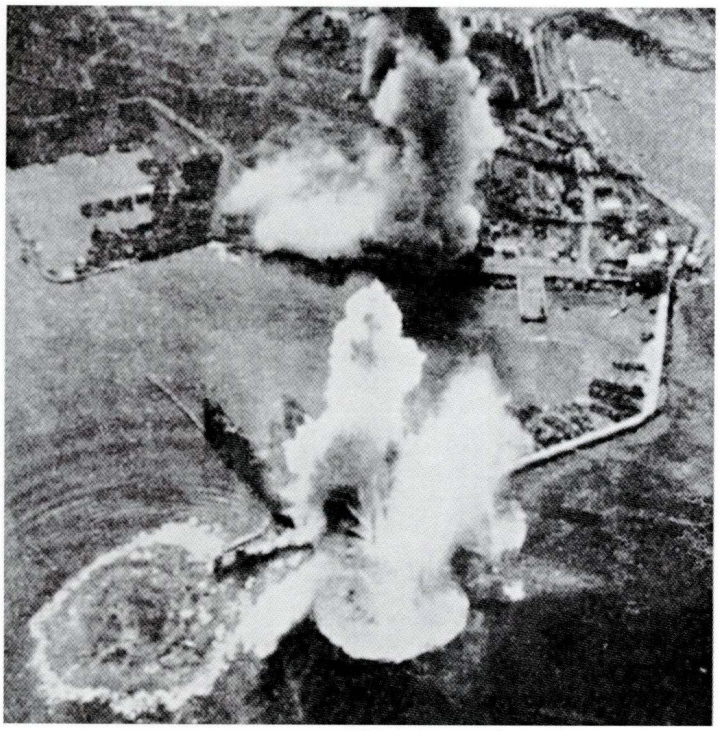
The 6th April had cost the Yugoslav Air Force some cruel losses. The 3rd Bomber Group and the 5th Fighter Group had been almost annihilated and the 6th Fighter Regiment lost around 50% of its forces in the defence of Belgrade. A total of 47 fighters, 45 bombers, 50 reconnaissance aircraft and many second-line types were destroyed, mainly on the ground. Although the *Luftwaffe* clearly had control of the air, Yugoslav pilots nevertheless attempted some daring actions, including that by Blenheim crews who took off without escort to bomb Arad and Timisoara airfields in Rumania and Graz in Austria. The two bombers which took off for Arad stood no chance and both were shot down, one by the *Ritterkreuzträger* and *Gruppenkommandeur* of III./JG 54, *Hptm.* Arnold Lignitz. The two bombers sent to Timisoara succeeded in releasing their bombs, although only one aircraft returned, and while two of the four Blenheims flying against Graz also released their bombs, one Blenheim crashed into a mountain. These almost suicidal attacks caused little damage, only one Bf 109 being destroyed at Graz, but they indicate that the Yugoslav



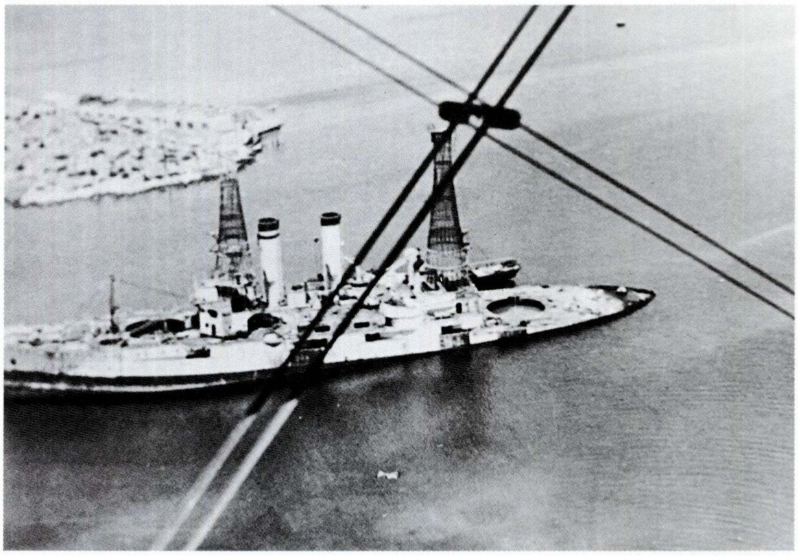
RIGHT: These Bf 109 Es of Hptm. Dietrich Hrabak's II./JG 54 are believed to have been photographed following the fall of Yugoslavia, at which time the Gruppe was withdrawn from the Balkans to convert to the Bf 109 F. The Gruppe's aircraft were left behind and many were passed on to JG 77.

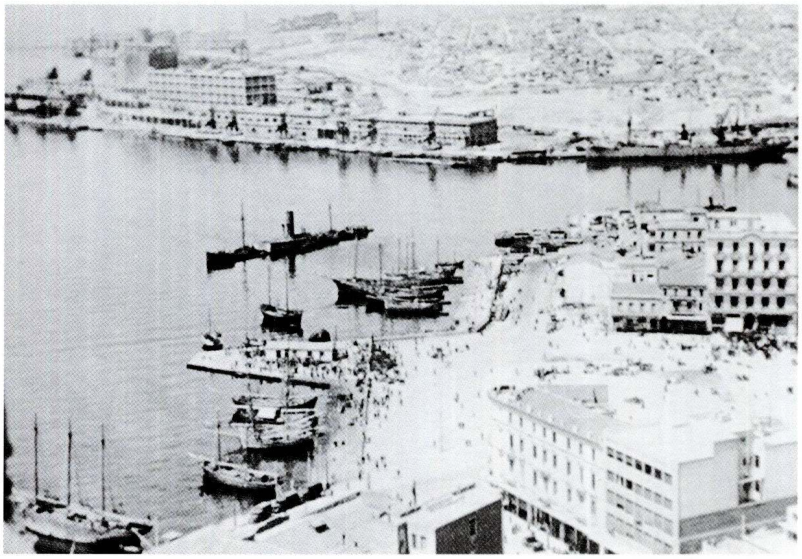
airmen were not prepared to capitulate without a fight. At Vrba, II./JG 27 was bombed on the ground by Yugoslav Do 17s but only four Bf 109s were lost and there were no personnel casualties.

While the main activity on the first day of *'Marita'* occurred over Yugoslavia, a significant blow against the Allies in Greece was struck the following night at Piraeus, the famous historical harbour of the Greek capital. The German High Command had not overlooked the fact that the main enemy remained the British and Commonwealth forces. Based in Sicily with 7./JG 26 and parts of III./ZG 76 were the Ju 88s of III./KG 30 and this *Gruppe* was now ordered to send its bombers to mine the Corinth Canal and bomb Piraeus Harbour to disrupt British shipping bringing supplies and reinforcements to Greece. In order to achieve surprise and to shorten the flying distance involved, the Ju 88s approached their targets from the south-west but encountered such bad weather over the Balkans that some crews decided to abort their missions. However, the *Staffelkapitän* of 7./KG 30, *Hptm.* Hajo Herrmann, whose target was British ships moored in Piraeus Harbour, decided to press on. Despite many difficulties, Herrmann's Ju 88 reached the harbour and released its bombs. The cargo ship *Clan Frazer*, which had arrived the day before and still had 250 tons of ammunition aboard, was hit and, to the astonishment of Herrmann's crew, blew up in a tremendous, cataclysmic explosion which destroyed many other vessels and devastated the harbour. With a single aircraft, the *Luftwaffe* had put out of action the rear base of the Commonwealth forces. Herrmann's Ju 88 was severely damaged by anti-aircraft fire and was unable to return to Sicily but, eventually, after many adventures, the crew landed safely on the island of Rhodes. Subsequently, Herrmann continued to fly with bomber units until 1943 when he took up a staff position. He was later to initiate the famed '*Wilde Sau*' fighter tactics and led JG 300, surviving the war but remaining for many years in Soviet captivity.

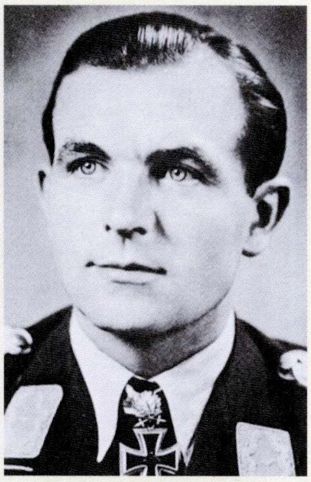


ABOVE: Taken from a Ju 87, this photograph shows a daylight attack on Piraeus Harbour, but on the night of 6/7 April 1941, Hptm. Hajo Herrmann, the Staffelkapitän of 7./KG 30, particularly distinguished himself when he took off from Gerbini in Sicily to bomb this target. Despite bad weather which forced some other aircraft to turn back, Herrmann pressed on and, flying into calmer weather and clear, moonlit skies, located the harbour. The bomb-aimer released the bombs during a glide attack from 10,000 feet and Herrmann climbed to await results. To the amazement of the German crew, there was a huge explosion which lit up the sky for miles around and caused a shock-wave which completely wrecked the harbour and severely buffeted Herrmann's aircraft. The bombs had hit the Clan Frazer, a vessel still loaded with 250 tons of explosives. The Clan Frazer completely disappeared in the blast and another ten ships were also destroyed. The loss of the harbour facilities was a severe blow to the British who were deprived of the one harbour (*ABOVE RIGHT AND RIGHT*) through which supplies could be passed to the British Army in Greece.





Herbert Ihlefeld



Major Herbert Ihlefeld

Herbert Ihlefeld was one of the most important aces of the *Luftwaffe* and, although he undoubtedly had an exceptional career and served throughout the war with several significant units, he remains also one of the least known.

Born on 1 June 1914 at Pinnow in Pomerania, Ihlefeld joined the Army's 5th Stettin Infantry Regiment in 1933, at the age of 19. On 15 July 1934, a time when aviation in Germany was the subject of rapid expansion following Adolf Hitler's rise to power, Ihlefeld started a course on aviation engineering. He later joined the *Luftwaffe*, began pilot training in January 1935, and in March 1937 was posted to I./JG 132 *'Richthofen'* at Döberitz where he became familiar with the He 72, He 51 and most other aircraft then serving in the new German Air Force.

Spain

With the benefit of about two years' experience as a pilot, the young, still unmarried *Unteroffizier* Ihlefeld volunteered for service in Spain. At the end of 1937 he joined 2./J 88 and flew a Heinkel 51 in the great Battle of Teruel. At that time, most of the aircraft used by both sides still had open cockpits and as aerial combat sometimes took place at high altitude, where temperatures reached -50°F, conditions were extremely difficult and uncomfortable. On 21 February 1938, Ihlefeld achieved his first victory, an I-15, known to the Nationalists as the *'Rata'*. In the course of the year, 2./J 88 was re-equipped with the Messerschmitt Bf 109 B and it was with this type of aircraft that Ihlefeld achieved eight more victories. In view of his nine *Abschüsse* and his obvious courage, he was promoted to acting *Leutnant*. Returning to Germany in July 1938, this promotion was confirmed and in 1939 he was awarded the Spanish Cross with Swords, the first of his many decorations, in recognition of his service and achievements in Spain.

Adjutant to I.(Jagd)/Lehrgeschwader 2

The newly promoted *Leutnant* Ihlefeld was then assigned as Technical Officer to I.*(Jagd)/Lehrgeschwader* 2 where his abilities as a pilot brought him to the attention of his *Kommandeur, Hptm*. Hanns Trübenbach who, in addition to commanding I.*(J)*/LG 2, also led the *Kunstflugstaffel*, the *Luftwaffe's* aerobatics team. Trübenbach offered Ihlefeld a place in the team which, in the months before the war, participated in various air meetings in western Europe. Due to his responsibilities with I.*(J)*/LG 2, Ihlefeld served mainly as a reserve pilot, but he nevertheless took part in rehearsals and became an effective member of the team. Due to the imminence of war, however, the *Kunstflugstaffel* was in existence for only a short time.

The First Months of War

On 1 September 1939, the *Wehrmacht* invaded Poland, a campaign in which I.*(J)*/LG 2 took part although, despite his impressive record in Spain, Ihlefeld was unable to increase his number of victories, nor in the subsequent so-called 'Phoney War'.

On 10 May 1940, the German Army attacked in the West and Ihlefeld was soon able to increase his score when, on 29 May 1940, he and the *Kommandeur*, Hptm. Bernhard Mielke, each claimed an MS 406 at approximately 20.15 hrs in the St. Quentin/Chauny sector, Ihlefeld's being his first confirmed victory in the West.[1] On 1 June 1940, Herbert Ihlefeld was promoted to *Oberleutnant* and on the 30th he was credited with destroying over St. Omer, two Blenheim bombers thought to be from RAF Coastal Command. During this action, Ihlefeld had to make a forced landing in his Bf 109, but was not injured. On this date, too, I.*(J)*/LG 2 was transferred to Pihen in anticipation of the battle against England.

BELOW: Ihlefeld photographed in Belgium in mid-May 1940 with (right) Hptm. Bernhard Mielke, Kommandeur of I.(J)/LG 2. When Mielke was shot down on 30 August 1940, he was replaced by Ihlefeld.

Over England

At the beginning of July, Ihlefeld acquired his first command when he took over as *Staffelkapitän* of 2./LG 2. On the 9th, when the *Gruppe* was escorting some Do 17s from KG 2, *Oblt.* Ihlefeld shot down his first Hurricane over Kent. From then on, victories came rapidly: a Hurricane on 13 August, two Spitfires on 23 August and two more on the 24th. On 30 August, when he achieved his tenth victory, he learned that his *Kommandeur, Hptm.* Mielke (Trübenbach's successor), had been shot down near Hastings. Ihlefeld was then appointed the new *Gruppenführer* and led the *Gruppe* without any break in his flying. On 13 September, after 21 victories (not including those achieved in Spain), Ihlefeld was awarded the *Ritterkreuz* and on 1 October 1940, in recognition of his decoration, and also to bring his rank in line with his duties as official *Kommandeur*, he was promoted to H*auptmann*.

ABOVE: Herbert Ihlefeld photographed in the Autumn of 1940.

I.(*J*)/LG 2 saw little action during the Winter of 1940/41 as the *Gruppe* was withdrawn from operations for about seven weeks in order to recuperate at Köln-Butzweilerhof. Returning to the Channel on 10 February 1941, Ihlefeld resumed operations and obtained his 27th victory, a Spitfire.

Herbert Ihlefeld's 30th victory has an interesting sequel. On 26 February 1941, two Spitfires from 54 Squadron at Hornchurch led a sweep over the Boulogne/Calais sector. Spitfire KL-E (P7443), belonging to Sgt. Howard Squire, was shot down by Ihlefeld's Bf 109, the pilot making a forced landing near Calais. As the aircraft had come down close to I.(*J*)/LG 2's base at Marck, this was an ideal opportunity to inspect the Spitfire and entertain the pilot in the mess. A *Luftwaffe* war correspondent later prepared a short article on the event, complete with appropriate photographs, which subsequently appeared in the *Wehrmacht* magazine '*Signal*'. Years after the war, the negatives of these photographs were located in a photo archive in France and identified by researcher Jean-Paul Pallud, then working for 'After the Battle' magazine. Their discovery inspired Winston Ramsey, editor of the magazine, to try to reunite the former adversaries. Happily, both Squire and Ihlefeld were still alive and, on 26 July 1984, they met again on the site of Squires' forced landing so that further photographs could be taken for a 'then and now' comparison. By that time, however, Ihlefeld admitted that he could barely remember the details as all his personal possessions had been looted by Soviet troops at the time of their entry into Berlin in May 1945.

On 25 March, *Hptm*. Ihlefeld achieved his 35th victory over a Spitfire near Dungeness. Soon after this, I.(*J*)/LG 2 left France as it was urgently required in the Balkans.

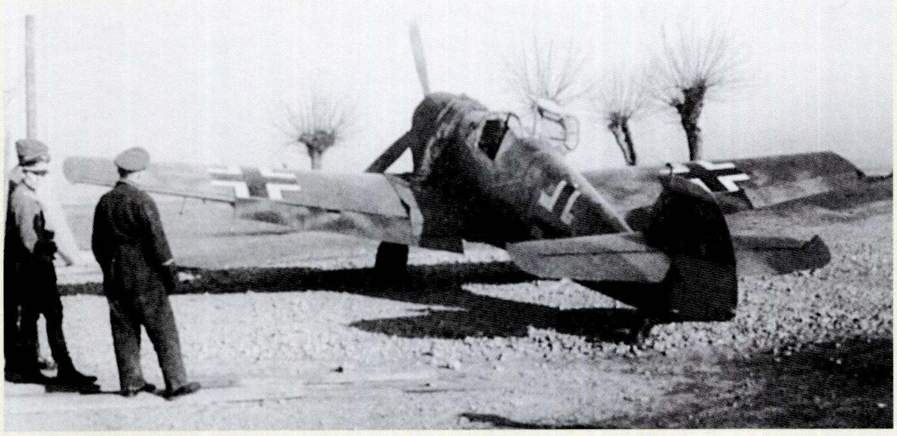
FAR LEFT, CENTRE AND LEFT: On 26 February 1941, Hptm. Ihlefeld shot down his 30th victory, a 54 Sqn. Spitfire, and is seen here with the pilot, Sgt. Howard Squire.

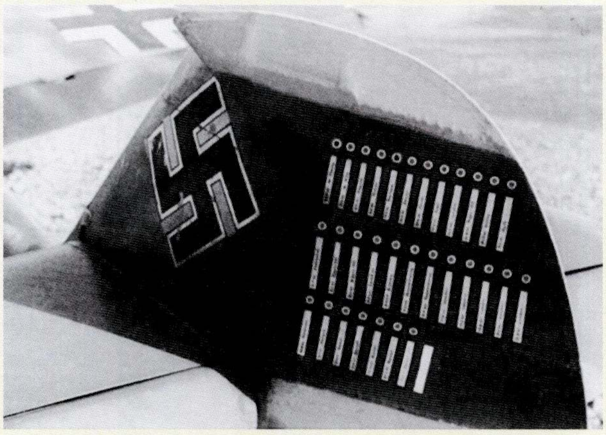
In the Balkans

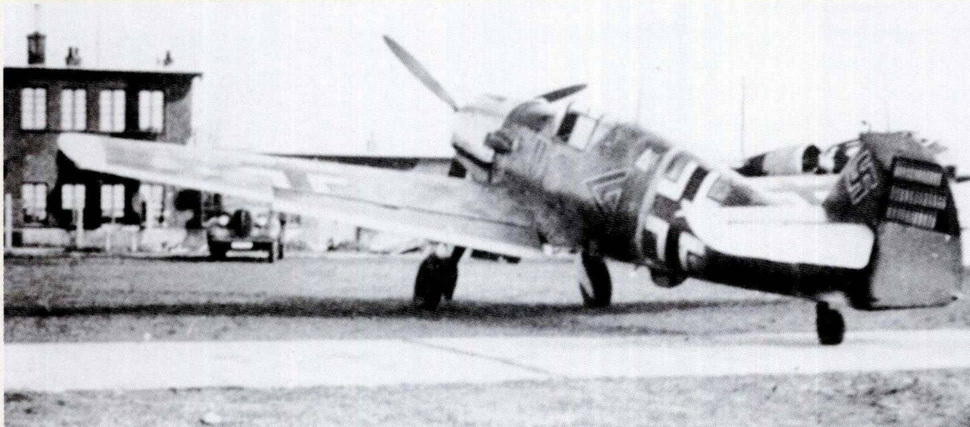
As Germany prepared to invade Greece, Yugoslavia broke off its alliance with the *Reich* and it therefore became equally necessary for Germany to bring Yugolavia as well as Greece under its control. Reinforcements in the form of men and equipment were brought to the area and on 1 April 1941, I.(*J*)/LG 2 moved to Radomir, in southern Bulgaria, in order to participate in operations. The offensive opened on 6 April, I.(*J*)/LG 2 operating against Yugoslav airfields around Nisch, and during its first mission, the *Gruppe* was involved in a great air battle over the airfield at Rezanovacka Kosa in which eight Hawker Furies were claimed destroyed in the air and another five aircraft destroyed on the ground. Later in the day, I.(*J*)/LG 2 flew several more missions of this type, one proving particularly successful when the *Gruppe* shot down two aircraft and damaged a third. However, Ihlefeld's aircraft - on this occasion he was flying Bf 109 E-7 W.Nr. 2057, 'Yellow 1' - was hit in the engine by ground fire. The Daimler Benz cut out and, with great difficulty, Ihlefeld made an emergency landing. He was soon captured by Serbian soldiers and was held in captivity for a week, during which time he was badly treated, being beaten and several times threatened with execution. He was later freed by a German armoured unit and, with his head bandaged, returned to his unit on the 14th to say goodbye to his men, just before I.(*J*)/LG 2 moved to Bitolj, near the Greek-Yugoslav border.[2] Ihlefeld then enjoyed a period of leave in order to recover from his injuries but was nevertheless back with his unit in time to participate in 'Operation *Merkur*', the invasion of Crete, during which he shot down a Hurricane over Maleme on 26 May as his 36th victory.

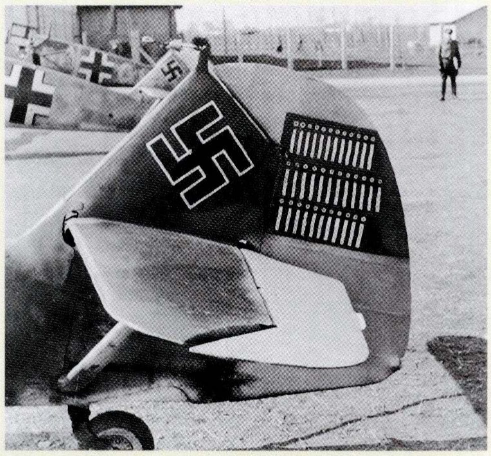
In Russia

By 22 June 1941, I.(*J*)/LG 2 had moved to Rumania in order to participate in 'Operation *Barbarossa*', the invasion of Russia. From the first days of the invasion, Ihlefeld claimed various victories: two SB-2s on the 23rd and three on the 26th. These brought his total to 41 and the next day he was awarded the Oak Leaves.



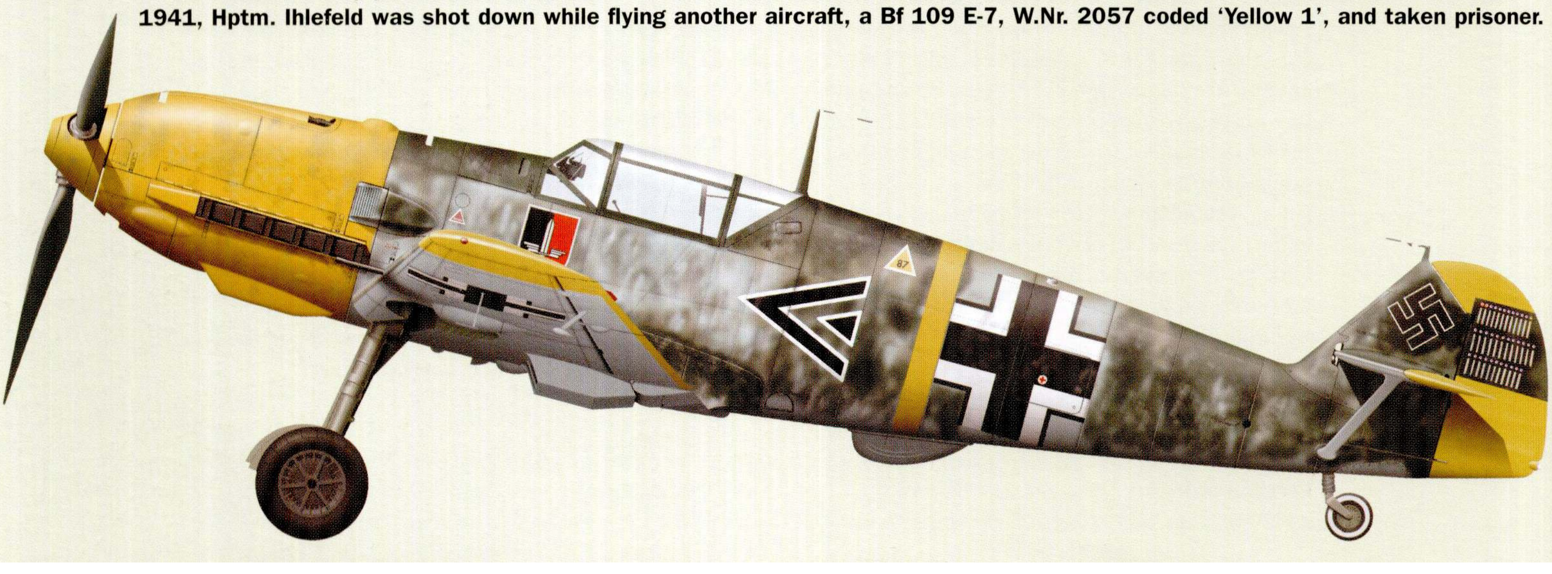




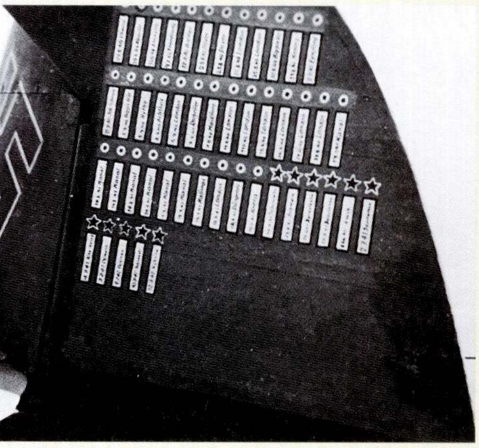


TOP LEFT AND RIGHT: Htm. Herbert Ihlefeld's Bf 109 E in Kecskemet in Hungary, probably on 14 March 1941, when I.(J)/LG 2 was on its way to Greece. (*LOWER LEFT*) For the Balkans campaign, the elevators and wing trailing edges were painted yellow in addition to the yellow recognition markings widely observed during the Battle of Britain. Note this aircraft was fitted with the Peil G IV direction-finding aid, the fairing for which may just be seen under the fuselage. (*LOWER RIGHT*) A closer view of the rudder of Ihlefeld's aircraft showing the 35 victory bars carried at the start of the Balkans campaign. Note also that the yellow on the rudder has now been slightly modified and, instead of running horizontally across the top of the rudder, has been extended to the hinge line.

Messerschmitt Bf 109 E-3, W.Nr. 5057, flown by Hptm. Herbert Ihlefeld of I.(Jagd)/LG 2, early April 1941
This aircraft was previously flown by Oblt. Josef Priller when Staffelkapitän of 6./JG 51 and then served with JG 52 where it was fitted with Peil G IV direction-finding equipment and used for night-fighter trials before being passed to I.(J)/LG 2. Although fitted with pilot's armour plate and a fairing over the tailwheel recess, the aircraft nevertheless retained an early, rounded canopy. For the Balkans campaign, the existing yellow on the nose was extended to include the rudder, wingtips and elevators, in addition to which was added a narrow yellow band around the fuselage and a thin strip along the wing trailing edges. The camouflage scheme was very dark and showed signs of considerable modification, particularly on the uppersurfaces of the wings, where the original splinter pattern was almost obliterated with patches and flecks of a third colour, possibly Blue 65 or a mixed light grey, perhaps applied to provide a more appropriate camouflage during the night-fighter trials. The 35 white victory bars on the rudder were rather unevenly placed and the emblem of JG 52 appeared in identical positions on both sides of the fuselage. On 6 April 1941, Hptm. Ihlefeld was shot down while flying another aircraft, a Bf 109 E-7, W.Nr. 2057 coded 'Yellow 1', and taken prisoner.



LEFT: On 6 April 1941, the first day of 'Marita', Hptm. Herbert Ihlefeld, the Kommandeur of I.(J)/LG 2 was shot down by ground fire near Nisch. Although he crash-landed safely, Ihlefeld was badly treated by Serbian soldiers and taken into captivity. He was later released by German forces, together with a number of other Luftwaffe personnel who had fallen into Yugoslav hands. This photograph shows Ihlefeld on his return to his unit and before he went on leave to recover.



RIGHT: The rudder of Hptm. Ihlefeld's Bf 109 decorated with 47 victory bars, the last being dated 12 July 1941.

RIGHT: Hptm. Ihlefeld (left), the Kommandeur of I.(J)/LG 2, with Generalleutnant Kurt Pflugbeil, commander of IV. Fliegerkorps, photographed at Jassy, Rumania, on 13 July 1941. Standing next to Ihlefeld and shaking hands with Pflugbeil is the Staffelkapitän of 7./JG 77, Oblt. Wolfdieter Huy, and (centre) with bowed head, Oblt. Arthur Brutzer of Stab III./JG 77.

BELOW: Herbert Ihlefeld (right) wearing the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves, pictured with Wolfdieter Huy.

I.(*J*)/LG 2 was then temporarily withdrawn from the front in order to protect certain strategic targets in Rumania, during which period Ihlefeld claimed six DB-3 bombers shot down on 3 August 1941.[3] Rather than note all Ihlefeld's *Abschüsse*, it is only necessary to mention that by 22 April 1942, on which date he shot down two I-61s and two I-301s, his total number of victories had increased to 101. By this time, I.(*J*)/LG 2 had, on 1 January 1942, been officially redesignated I./JG 77, the *Gruppe* having operated jointly with II. and III./JG 77 since the start of the offensive in the East.

On 24 April 1942, now with more than the 100 victories required for a further decoration, Ihlefeld was awarded the Swords. He remained with I./JG 77 for a few weeks, in which time he increased his score to 103, and was then summoned to the *Führer's* HQ were Hitler personally presented him with his new decoration and promoted him to *Major*.

BELOW: Hitler presenting Herbert Ihlefeld (far left) with the Swords to his Knight's Cross. Also present to receive the Oak Leaves are Hptm. Huy (centre) and Hptm. Wolfgang Späte.

Kommodore

On 11 May, in order to prepare him for his future role as a *Kommodore*, *Major* Ihlefeld underwent a training course for commanding officers at the headquarters of JG 51. He then took command of JG 52 on 22 June 1942 but, on orders from Hitler and Göring, was formally forbidden to fly on the grounds that his irreplaceable experience had to be preserved. However, as with other pilots affected by this order, this ban did not stop Ihlefeld from flying further combat missions although, in order to keep the matter secret, his victories were no longer attributed to him. Ironically, however, on 22 July 1942, he was hurt in a non-combat accident when he crashed in an Fi 156 while taking off from Taganrog. Although the *Storch*, (CQ+QC, W.Nr. 4436) was 75% destroyed, Ihlefeld escaped with only slight injuries.

On 29 October 1942, Ihlefeld left JG 52 in order take command of the training unit *Jagdschule* 3 which, in January 1943, was redesignated JG 103. However, this was not to Ihlefeld's liking and, eventually, on 21 July 1943, he left to take command of JG 25. This unit, formed in August from *Stab/Jagdgruppe Nord*, only ever comprised a single *Gruppe* not even the size of a *Staffel* and, equipped with Messerschmitt 109s, it specialised in high-altitude operations, particularly against the RAF's Mosquitoes. JG 25 was in existence only for some five months, and when it was disbanded in December, Ihlefeld took over the headquarters of the 30.*Jagddivision* which co-ordinated the activities of JG 300, 301 and 302, then specialising in night-fighter operations with single-engined aircraft. In this role, Ihlefeld was able to study the different tactics employed to attack the Allied bombers which swept over Germany.

During the first half of 1944, several experienced offices were lost, notably in JG 2 where two *Kommodore, Oberstleutnant* Egon Mayer and *Major* Kurt Ubben, were killed within two months. Faced with a shortage of experienced officers, the *Luftwaffe* was obliged to break its own official ban preventing its most successful pilots from flying in combat and placed several of its great aces with front-line units. Consequently, *Oberstleutnant* Ihlefeld was first posted to the *Stab* of JG 11 where he remained for just eight days until, at the beginning of May 1944, he transferred to the *Stab* of JG 1. Here Ihlefeld quickly proved that not only was he effective against enemy fighters, but also that he was equally accomplished as a "bomber-killer" and on 8 May, in two missions, he shot down two B-17s, his 111th and 112th victories. At the headquarters of JG 1, Ihlefeld was assisting another legendary ace, *Oberst* Walter Oesau, but any collaboration was short-lived as 'Gull' Oesau was himself shot down and killed on 11 May. Nine days later, Ihlefeld took command of JG 1 and remained with this *Geschwader* until the end of the war.

Following the Allied landings in Normandy in June 1944, Ihlefeld settled down with *Stab* JG 1 at St. Quentin where he found himself, once again, charged with forming a high-altitude unit by bringing together the four existing *Höhengruppen*, III./JG 1, I./JG 3, I./JG 5 and II./JG 11, all of which specialised in the role of engaging the bombers' fighter escort. Placed under Ihlefeld's control they often occupied the same airfield. Meanwhile, Ihlefeld continued to add to his score, shooting down three Spitfires on 12 July, a P-51 and a Spitfire on the 14th, a P-38 on the 18th, a Lancaster and a Spitfire on the 25th and two P-51s on 27 July and 1 August.

After returning to Germany at the end of August to re-equip and gain some new pilots, JG 1 then experienced dreadful losses during the Autumn battles over the *Reich*. On 26 November, Ihlefeld accounted for his 123rd victory, but it was a deadly battle which cost JG 1 eleven killed and three wounded, including some very experienced pilots.

By the middle of January 1945, as with many other *Jagdgeschwader* based in the West, JG 1 was sent urgently to the Eastern Front where Soviet forces were advancing on the River Oder. JG 1 launched many sorties, principally ground-attack or fighter-bomber escort missions. Paradoxically, this transfer to the East benefited a great number of JG 1's pilots as losses in the East were moderate at a time when those in the West were catastrophic. Undoubtedly JG 1 again achieved numerous victories, and although few documents from this chaotic period have survived, Ihlefeld obviously gained some further *Abschüsse* as his final official score reached 132 victories. A short training course on the He 162 followed, after which JG 1 was ordered back to the West and was based at Leck, in Schleswig-Holstein, Northern Germany. The *Geschwader* was still there in May 1945 when Germany surrendered and JG 1's jet-fighters, together with its prestigious *Kommodore*, were captured by the British.

BELOW: Standing chatting in front of He 162s belonging to JG 1, officers await the arrival of the Allies at Leck in May 1945. From left to right: Major Zober, Oberst. Ihlefeld, Hptm. Künneke, Oblt. Demuth, Major Gallowitsch and Hptm. Strasen.

After 1945

After the war, Herbert Ihlefeld was not able to return to his Berlin home or his native Pomerania due to the Soviet occupation. Instead, he settled in Wennigsen, in the Hanover region, and returned to his life as an engineer. It was in this village that he died on 8 August 1995, after a long illness which, during the last months of his life, confined him to bed. He was laid to rest with full military honours in the presence of former *Hptm.* Ernst-Wilhelm Reinert, one of the few surviving holders of the Swords. Ihlefeld's final tally totalled nine victories in Spain in 1938 plus 132 more between 1940 and 1945, among which were no fewer than 15 four-engined bombers.

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1. In this context, 'the West' refers to Germany's Western Front. Therefore this was Ihlefeld's first victory on that front and does not include those obtained in Spain. It should be noted, however, that in Paul Martin's book *Invisible Victors*, there are no MS 406s reported lost on this date.
2. This reunion was the subject of a one-page report in the aviation magazine *Der Adler*.
3. Again it should be noted that this number cannot be confirmed from Russian sources.

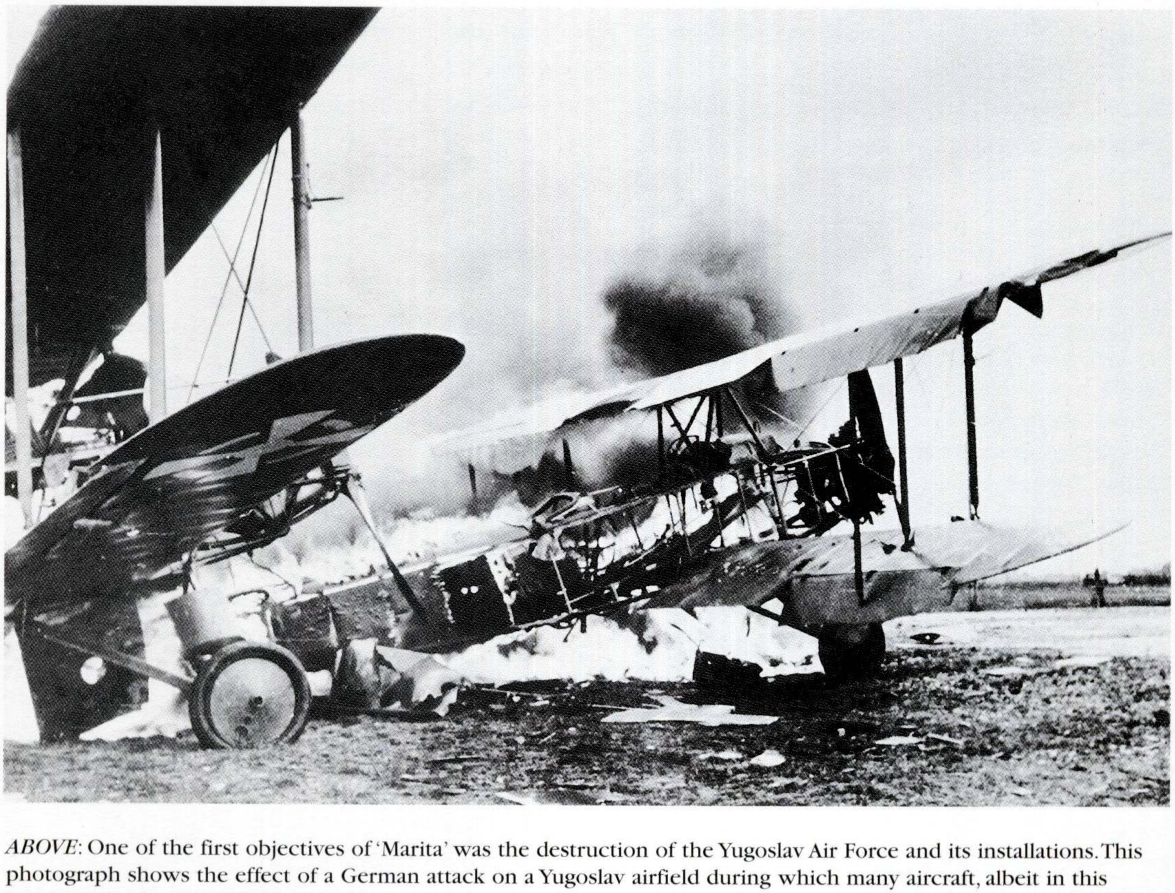
The Destruction of the Yugoslav Air Force

On 7 April, the weather was again very bad as, in Northern Greece, German ground troops battled against the mountainous defensive positions of the Metaxas Line. At the same time, Ju 87s escorted by the Bf 109s of JG 27 made pinpoint attacks against the Greek bunkers, but the Hellenic soldiers put up such stubborn resistance that they gained the ungrudging admiration even of their German opponents.

Over Yugoslavia, the situation was quieter than the previous day. The seriously weakened Yugoslav Air Force again tried to put up a handful of aircraft in sporadic attempts to oppose *Luftwaffe* raids against purely military targets in Belgrade, but resistance by the Yugoslav Air Force was gradually decreasing. Although JG 77 claimed two aircraft destroyed on an airfield south of Belgrade and the German fighters also flew escort duties, *freie Jagd* sorties and strafing attacks, it was becoming increasingly difficult to find aerial opposition. In the afternoon of the 7th, JG 54 escorted bombers attacking Novi Sad airfield, a railway bridge at Indjidje and shipping on the Danube. At least seven Yugoslav Me 109s were shot down, two being claimed by *Ritterkreuzträger Oblt.* Hans Philipp, *Staffelkapitän* of 4./JG 54. Future Knight's Cross holder *Ofw.* Max Stotz of the same unit claimed another as his 16th *Luftsieg.*

Once again the Yugoslav Blenheims attempted counter-attacks over Austria and Hungary, but their actions were hindered by the bad weather. Around midday, 5./JG 54 attacked a formation of bombers near Szeged, and the *Staffelkapitän, Oblt.* Hubert Mütherich, previously with 3./JG 77 and IV./JG 51, shot down two Blenheims. *Lt.* Wolfgang Späte claimed one, *Lt.* Josef Pöhs another, and further Blenheims were lost to anti-aircraft fire or fighters. All three of the German pilots mentioned would later receive the *Ritterkreuz.* Near Mostar, to the south, 6./JG 54 claimed at least one Yugoslav Hurricane which was attacking Ju 88s.

On 8 April, the weather was again so bad that many units were grounded, but the soldiers of the *Heer* destroyed a number of pockets of resistance which allowed them to continue their advances into Yugoslavia and Greece. Few bomber sorties were flown and fighter activity on both sides was severely restricted. At Taranto, in Southern Italy, Müncheberg's 7./JG 26 waited in vain for orders but as there were no targets, the *Staffel* returned to Sicily and prepared to resume operations over Malta.



ABOVE: One of the first objectives of 'Marita' was the destruction of the Yugoslav Air Force and its installations. This photograph shows the effect of a German attack on a Yugoslav airfield during which many aircraft, albeit in this instance obsolete Zmaj FN trainers, were destroyed on the ground. About 140 aircraft of this type saw service with the Yugoslav Air Force, some with Walter NZ radial engines, as the example seen on the right in this view, while others, as seen on the left of the photograph, were fitted with Maybach in-line engines. Several survived the German invasion and were later handed over to the Croatian Air Force.

ABOVE: A Waffen-SS interpreter, probably attached to the SS Leibstandarte Division, receives the surrender of Belgrade from the city's mayor.

By 9 April, the *Blitzkrieg* in Greece had proved so effective that part of the Greek army, situated between Vardar and the Turkish border, capitulated. Meanwhile, in Yugoslavia, German armed forces opened a new front on the Austrian border where there were many Croat troops who were not prepared to die for a hated Yugoslavia. Against such weak opposition, *Panzergruppe Kleist* soon took Nisch, so opening a new route for the invasion forces, but in the air only III./JG 54 and I.(*J*)/LG 2 appear to have seen any action. Attacking airfields to the north of Yugoslavia, *Oblt.* Hans-Ekkehard Bob, *Staffelkapitän* of 9./JG 54, claimed an IK-2, *Lt.* Gerhard Koall of 7. *Staffel* claimed his second Yugoslav victory and *Lt.* Erwin Leykauf was credited with a Hurricane. Pilots of I.(*J*)/LG 2 also claimed two Hurricanes and an Ikarus and although these victories were reported as being in the Belgrade area, it is possible that they occurred in the north and that the opponents of both III./JG 54 and I.(*J*)/LG 2 were from the 4th Aerial Regiment.

The German ground forces had now advanced so far that it became necessary for the fighter units to move forward in order that they remain within effective range of the front lines. With a slight improvement in the weather on 10 April, III./JG 27 moved to Bitolj and III./JG 77 flew to Skopje which had only recently fallen into German hands. Flying conditions, however, were still far from ideal and *Stab*/JG 27 lost *Oblt.* Herbert Mardaas, the *Geschwader TO,* who crashed to his death near Bogomila while on a strafing mission, apparently having lost his orientation in the poor weather.

Flying during the next two days was again restricted by the weather, but whenever conditions permitted, Bf 109s took off on bomber escort missions or to strafe enemy columns. JG 27 seems to have been more active over Greece, while other fighter units operated over areas of Yugoslavia still held by remnants of the Yugoslav Army. By this time, the Yugoslav Air Force had become totally disorganised and as opposition was practically non-existent, bomber escort missions were left to the Bf 110 heavy fighters of the *Zerstörer Gruppen.* During the night of 12/13 April, Belgrade fell into German hands, so marking the beginning of the end for Yugoslavia, and on the afternoon of the 13th, a *Kette* from 6./JG 27 moved to Bitolj. While *en route*, the three Bf 109s met six unescorted Blenheims of the RAF's 211 Squadron flying in two vic formations, each of three aircraft, near Prilep. Attacking first the rear formation, the German pilots shot down all three aircraft in flames and then continued with the destruction of the three machines of the leading vic. *Hptm.* Hans-Joachim Gerlach, the *Staffelkapitän*, *Fw.* Herbert Krenz and *Uffz.* Fritz Gromotka, another future *Ritterkreuzträger*, were each credited with two victories.

The Yugoslav Air Force

On paper, the Yugoslav Air Force, or JKRV (Jugoslovensko Kraljevsko Ratno Vazduhoplosvstvo), appeared powerful but consisted of a mixture of such obsolete types as the Hawker Fury, Hawker Hind, Dornier Wal, and Potez 25 etc, as well as modern Bf 109s, Blenheims and Do 17Ks.

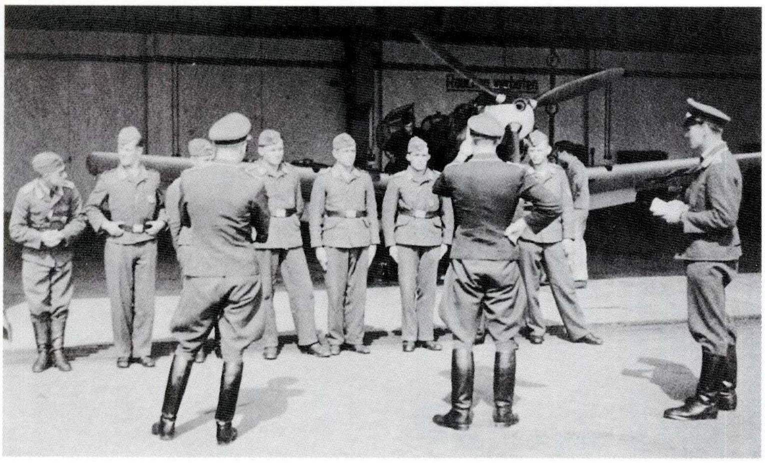
As with most air forces in the area, the JKRV's greatest weakness lay in the variety of very different aircraft types which had been purchased from a number of countries depending on which one dominated the aircraft market at a particular time. Yugoslavia had, however, like many other European countries, tried to develop its own aviation industry, but whereas the Polish Air Force, for example, was able to equip solely with different PZL types, Yugoslavia was unable to do so on a sufficient scale. The indigenous Ikarus fighters were therefore supplemented by about 61 Bf 109s and 60 Do 17 Ks from Germany, 40 Hurricanes, 57 Blenheim Is, 30 Hawker Furies from Great Britain and 26 Savoia S.76 aircraft from Italy. In addition, there were various older types such as the Bf 108, Fi 156, Do 22 and Do *Wal*, the Avia BH-33 from Czechoslovakia and at least one Fleet liaison aircraft from the USA.

Considering the fighter aircraft alone, Yugoslavia was the only country apart from Rumania which operated the Messerschmitt 109 (designated Me 109 in Yugoslavia and distinguished as such in the main text) and the Hurricane, the two main types which had fought each other during the Battle of Britain in 1940.

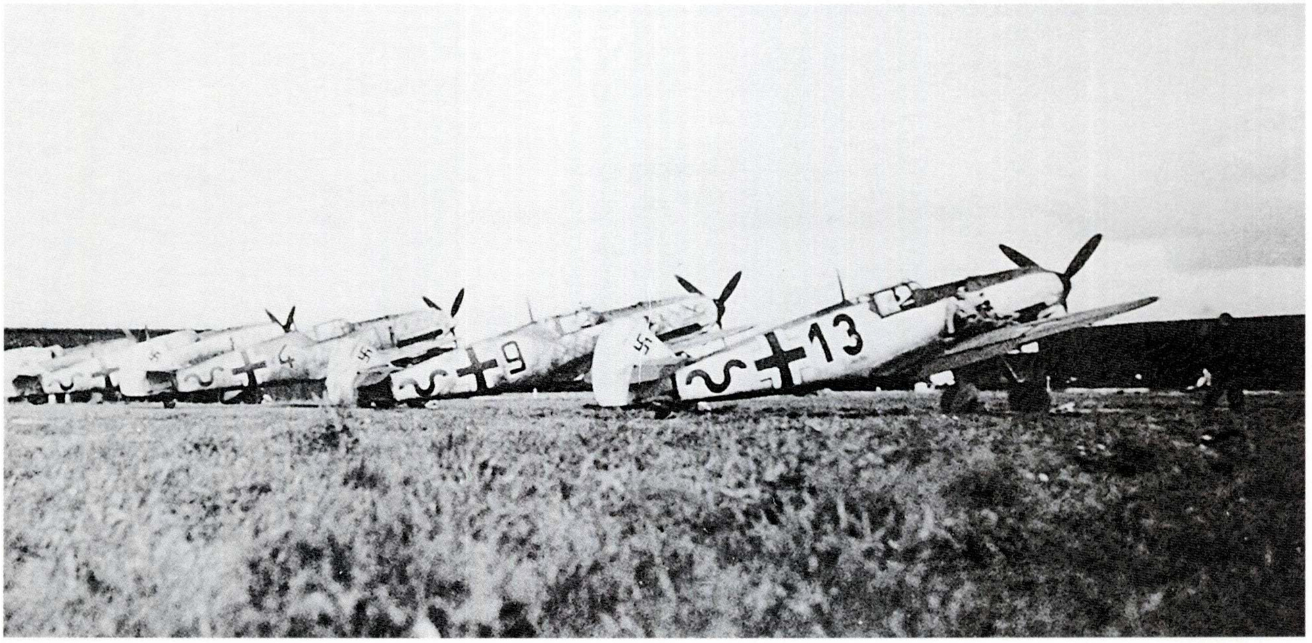
The Greek Air Force

The Greek Air Force, or *Elleniki Vassiliki Aeroporia*, was very weak, and it was because of its lack of any strength that Prime Minister Metaxas felt unable to refuse help from Britain's Royal Air Force to counter Italian bombers flying virtually unmolested to attack strategic targets in Greece.

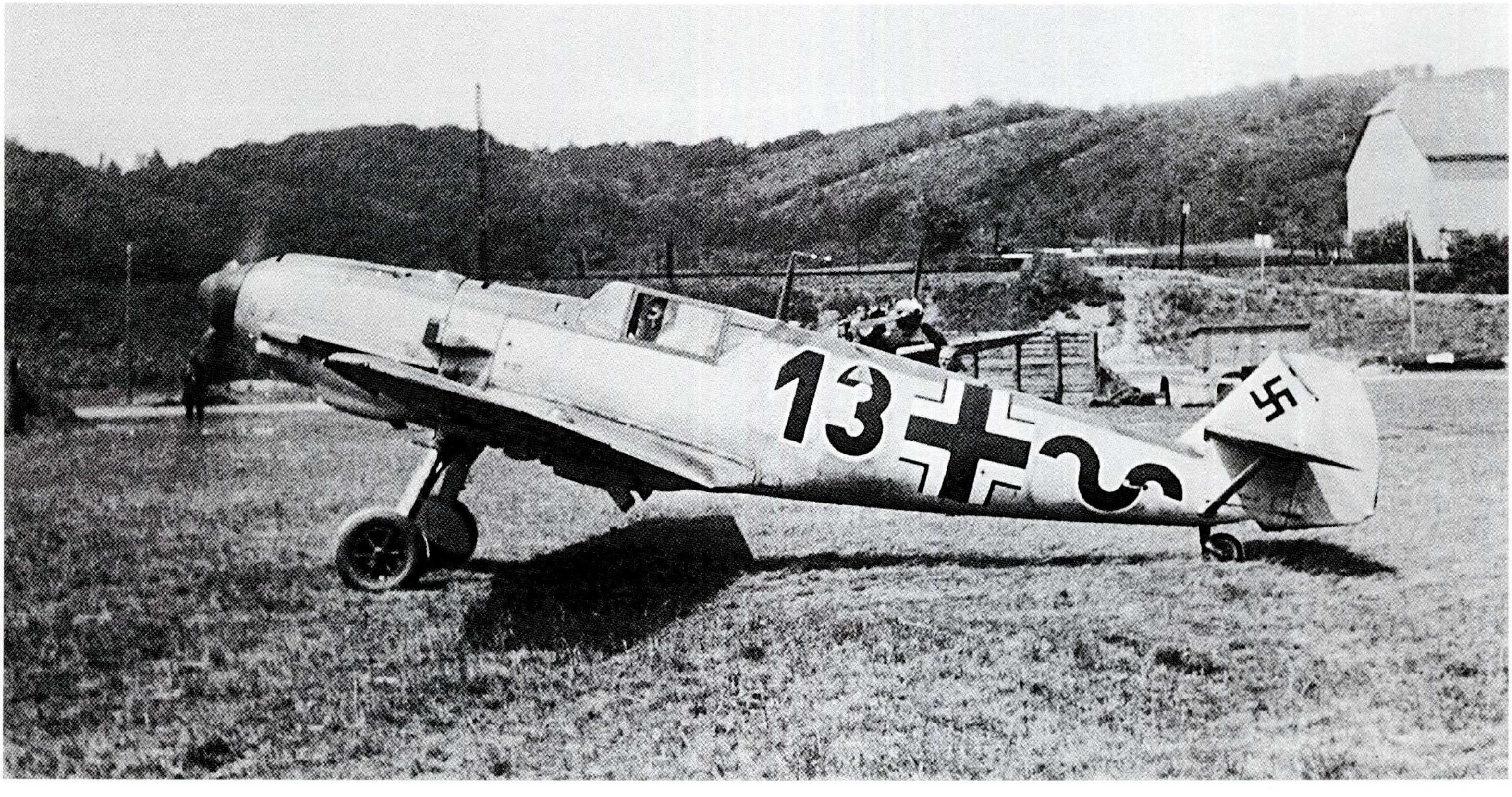
Unlike Yugoslavia, Greece had not tried to design and build its own aircraft but had purchased mainly PZL fighters from Poland and such types as the Bloch MB 151, Breguet XIX, Potez 25 and Potez 63 from France. Other types in the Greek Air Force included about 12 British Fairey Battles, 12 Blenheim IVs and a few Fairey IIIFs and Avro Ansons, plus about 15 Hs 126s and 12 Do 22s which came from Germany.



LEFT: At the end of July 1940, III./JG 52 was recalled to Germany after suffering heavy losses during the Battle of Britain. The Gruppe spent August and September at Zerbst, near Innsbruck, where the Staffelkapitäne were kept very busy rebuilding their Staffeln. Here, at Zerbst, Lt. Günther Rall (centre) is addressing the pilots of his 8. Staffel.

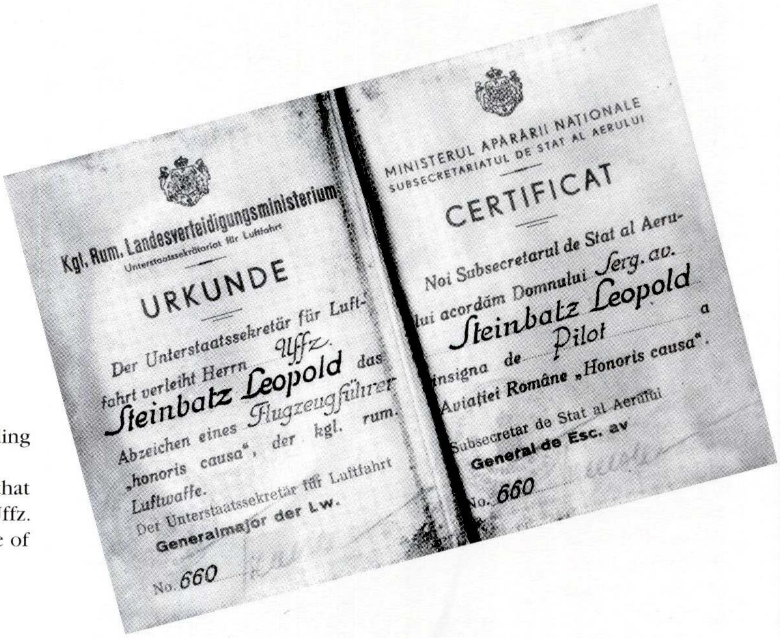


RIGHT AND BELOW: Bf 109 Es of 8./JG 52 at Zerbst in Germany, September 1940, shortly before their departure to Rumania. In the foreground is 'Black 13', seen again (*BELOW*) running-up its engine at Zerbst. The oversize fuselage number and Gruppe bar are particularly conspicuous.



LEFT: The Luftwaffe Mission in Rumania was led by Generalleutnant Wilhelm Speidel. When the German penetration of Rumania began, it was specifically mentioned that officers were to be detached who had front-line experience, and many were therefore transferred from France where Speidel himself had formerly been Chief of Staff, Luftflotte 2. Of the 54 aerodromes known to exist in Rumania, the Germans selected the most suitable and as a result, 22 aerodromes of varying value are believed to have been used by the Luftwaffe in Rumania. This photograph showing Bf 109 Es of III./JG 52 was probably taken at Bucharest-Pipera. For camouflage purposes while in Rumania, this Gruppe was redesignated I./JG 28.

RIGHT: As a sign of their appreciation, the Rumanians awarded an honorary pilot's badge to certain Luftwaffe personnel who had assisted in the training of Rumanian pilots. This certificate commemorates such an award to Uffz. Leopold Steinbatz, the later Schwerterträger of JG 52, who joined 9./JG 52 (3./JG 28) in Rumania in November 1940. Under the heading 'Royal Rumanian Ministry of Defence', the certificate states, in German and Rumanian, that the Under-Secretary of State for Air awards Uffz. Leopold Steinbatz the honorary pilot's badge of the Royal Rumanian Air Force.



Kgl. Rum. Landesverteidigungsministerium
Unterstaatssekretariat für Luftfahrt

URKUNDE

Der Unterstaatssekretär für Luftfahrt verleiht Herrn Uffz. Steinbatz Leopold das Abzeichen eines Flugzeugführer „honoris causa", der kgl. rum. Luftwaffe.

Der Unterstaatssekretär für Luftfahrt
Generalmajor der Lw.

No. 660

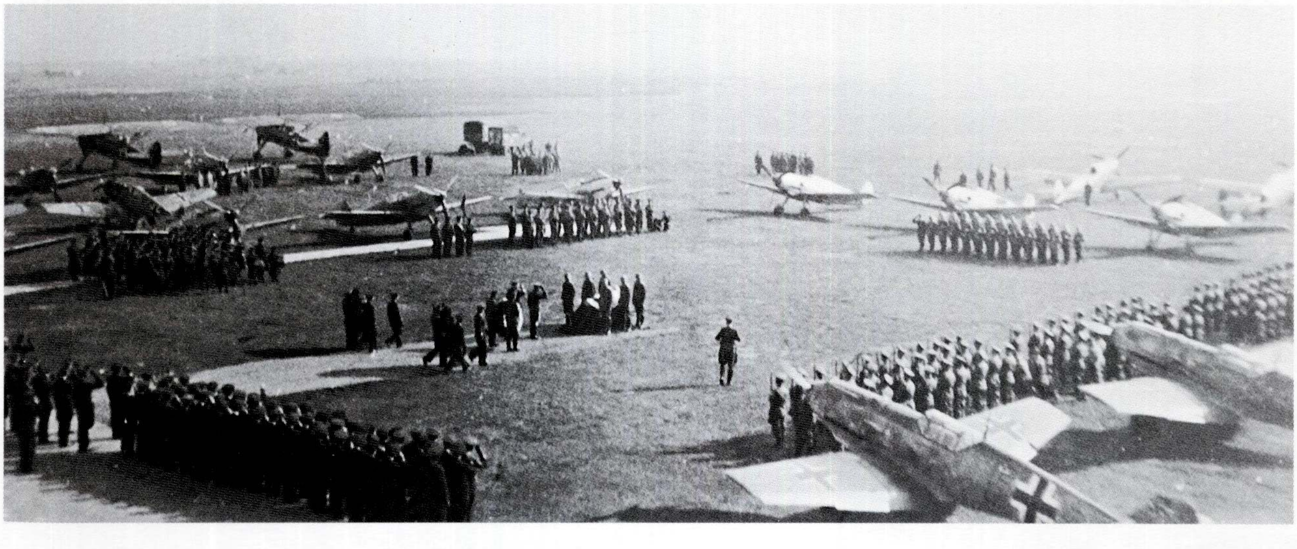
MINISTERUL APĂRĂRII NATIONALE
SUBSECRETARIATUL DE STAT AL AERULUI

CERTIFICAT

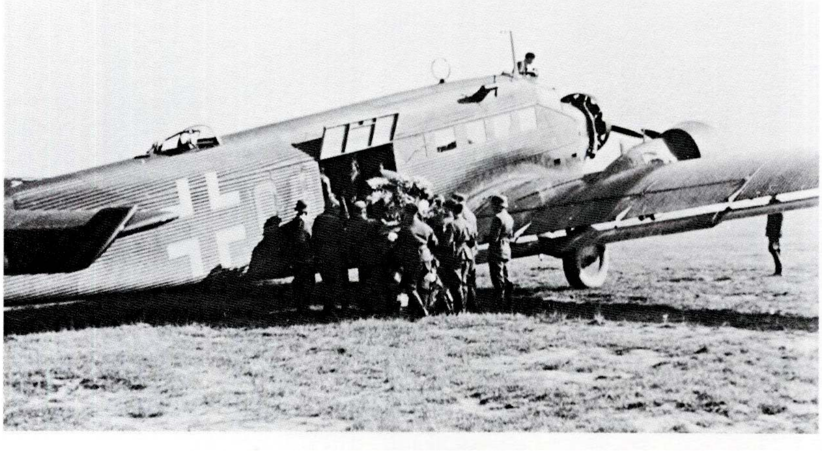
Noi Subsecretarul de Stat al Aerului acordăm Domnului Serg. av. Steinbatz Leopold insigna de Pilot a Aviaţiei Române „Honoris causa".

Subsecretar de Stat al Aerului
General de Esc. av

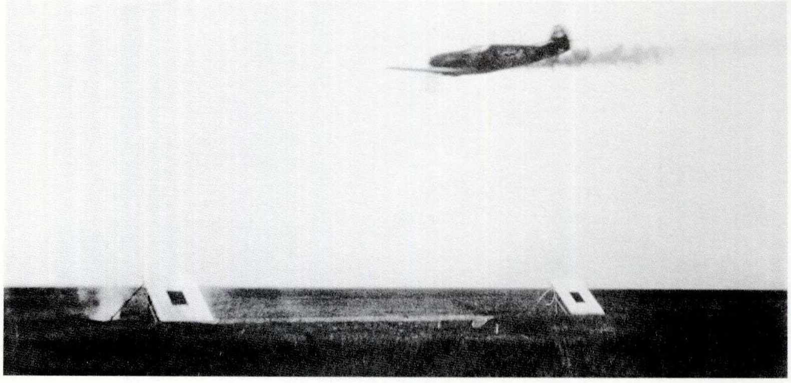
No. 660

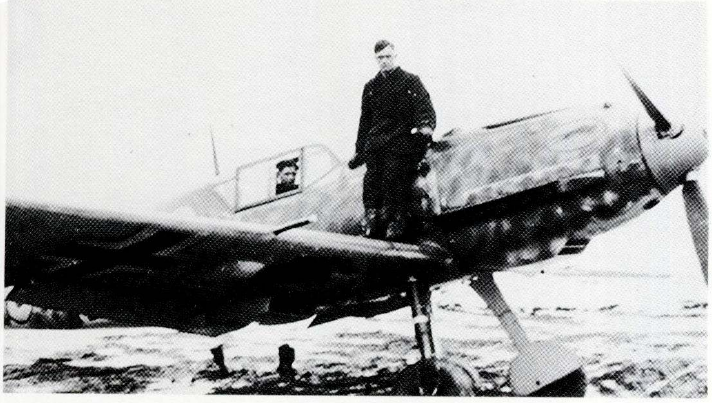


ABOVE AND RIGHT: On 7 November 1940, Bf 109 E-1 W.Nr. 3355 of 3./JG 28, formerly 9./JG 52, crashed near Branesti during an exercise and the pilot, Gefreiter Erich Erb, was killed. A parade was held in his memory (*ABOVE*) after which the coffin containing Erb's body was loaded aboard a Ju 52/3m (*RIGHT*) at Bucharest prior to being flown home.



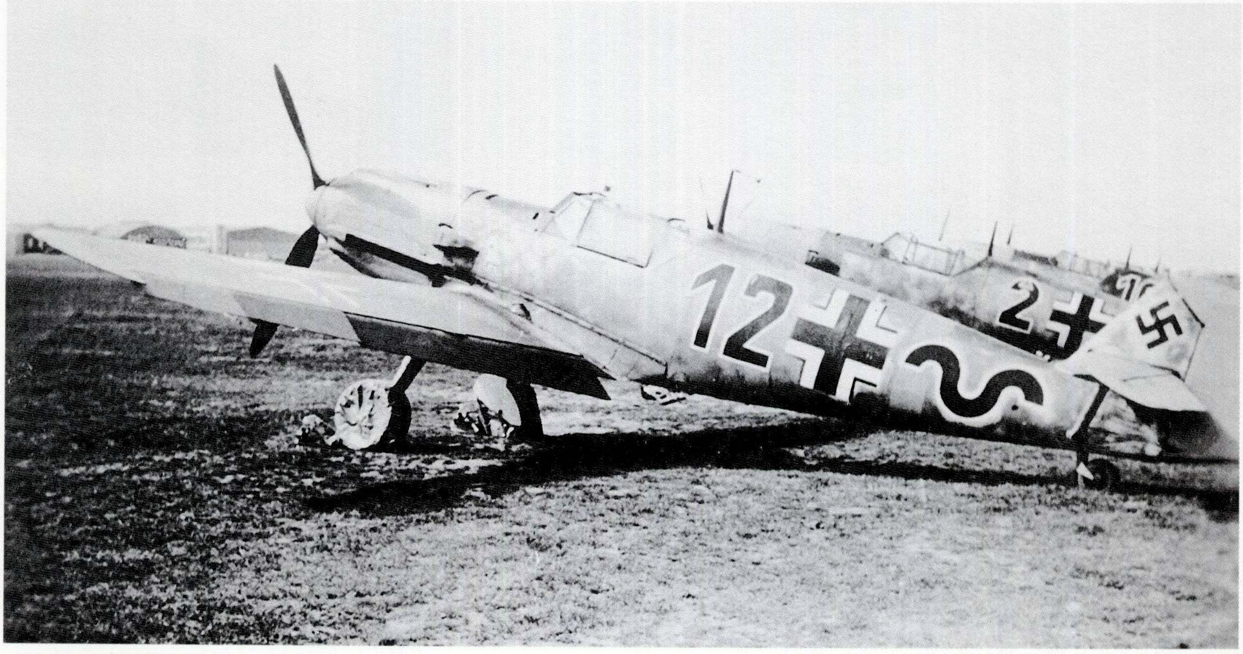
RIGHT: A Bf 109 E of I./JG 28 during a ground-strafing exercise in Rumania in the Winter of 1940/41.





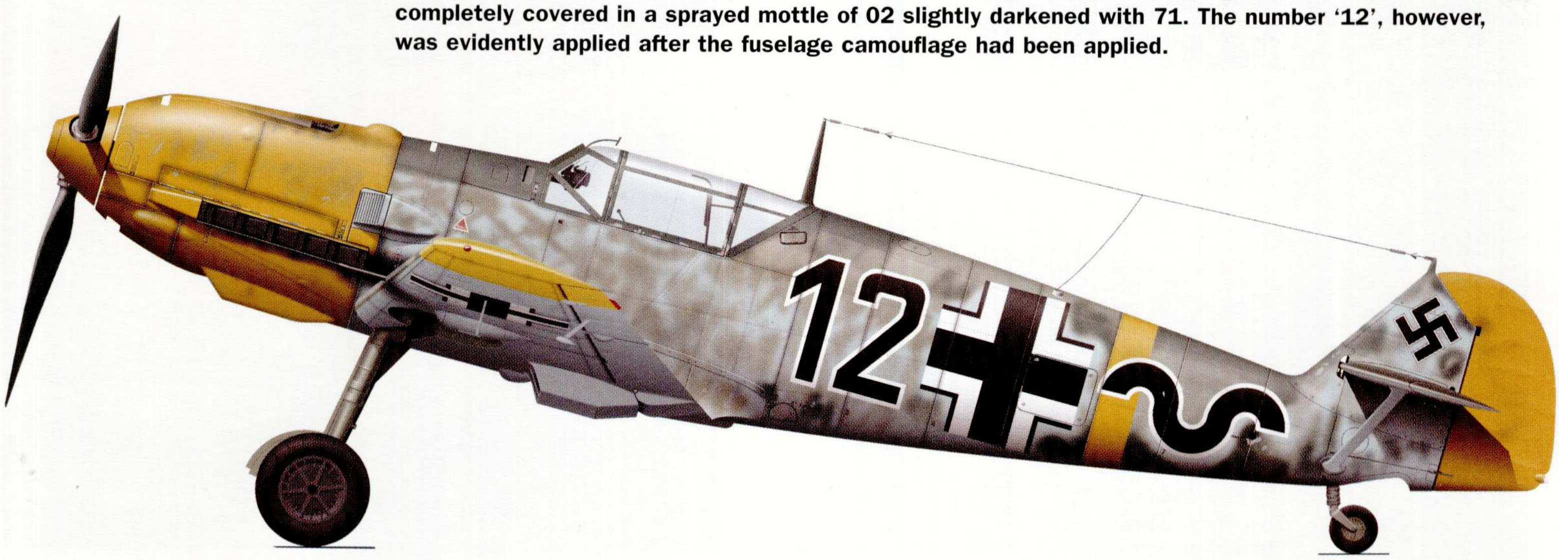
LEFT: Bf 109 Es of I./JG 28 in Rumania during the Winter of 1940/41. Note the emblem of III./JG 52 on the nose and the mottled camouflage which completely covers the fuselage sides and extends to the area below the exhaust and the sides of the oil cooler intake. For camouflage purposes, these areas were normally considered as undersurfaces and left in Blue 65.

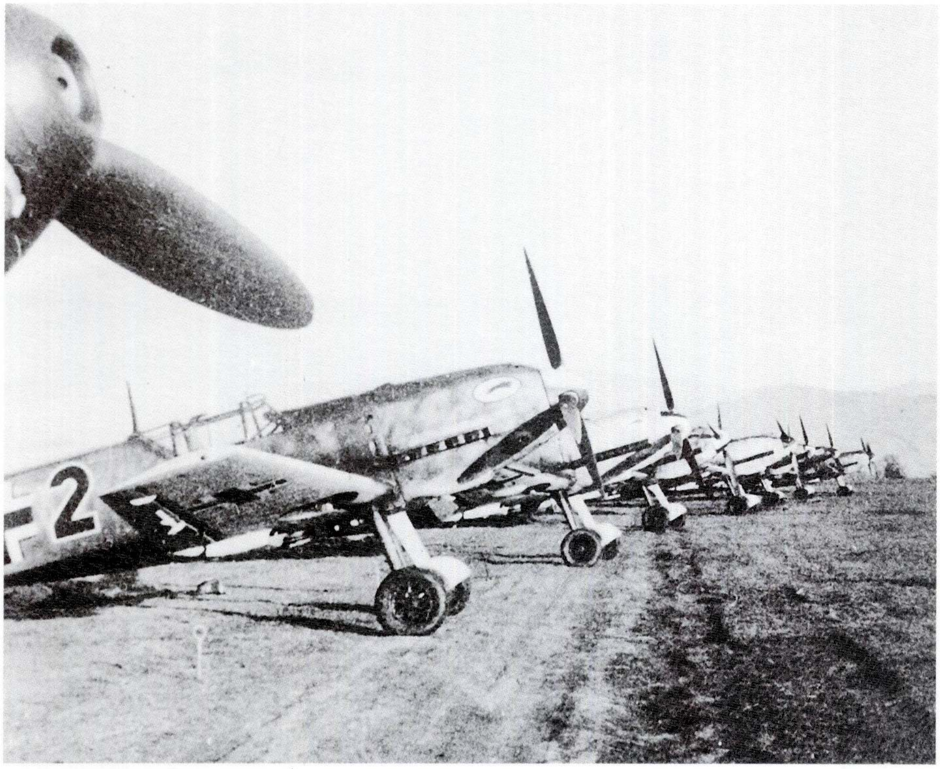
RIGHT: Bf 109 Es of 8./JG 52 (2./JG 28) in Rumania during the Winter of 1940/41. 'Black 12' has been fitted with an armoured windscreen, and external rear-view mirror. Note the yellow rudder, wingtip and narrow band backing the forward part of the wavy III. Gruppe bar as well as the slight differences in the style of '2' compared with 'Black 2', the next aircraft in the line.

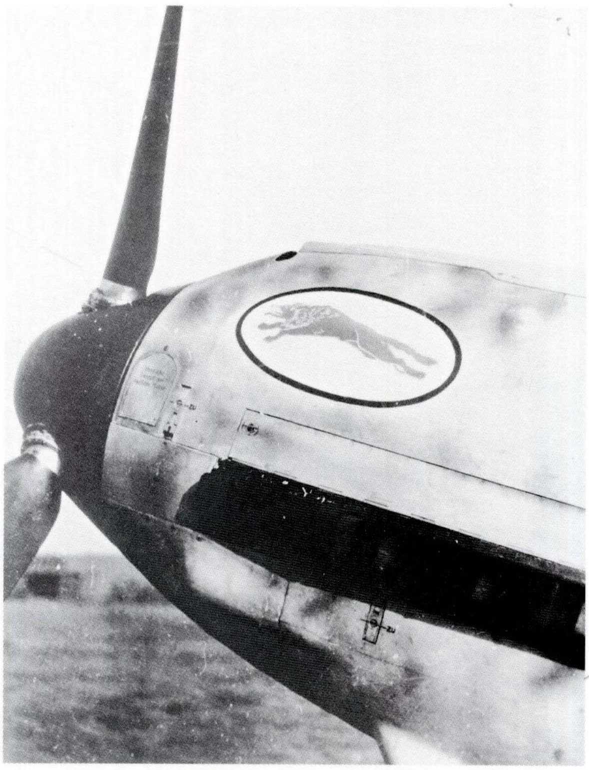


Messerschmitt Bf 109 E of 8./JG 52 (I./JG 28) in Rumania, Winter 1940/41

'Black 12', probably a Bf 109 E-3, has a 71/02 scheme which has been applied around the cross, swastika and Gruppe symbol in such a way that the original Blue 65 fuselage sides are almost completely covered in a sprayed mottle of 02 slightly darkened with 71. The number '12', however, was evidently applied after the fuselage camouflage had been applied.



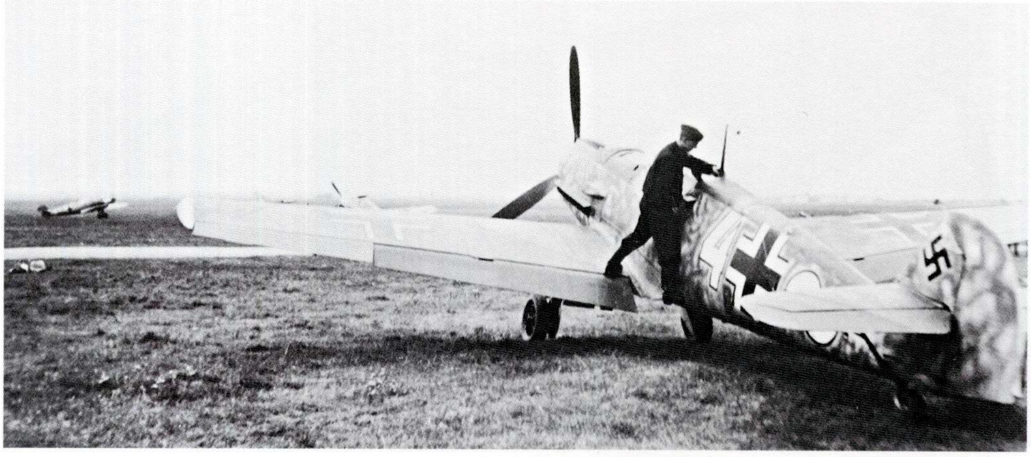




ABOVE: A line-up of Bf 109 Es from 8./JG 52 in Arad. On the forward cowling is a yellow oval edged in black with the superimposed black Running Wolf emblem of III./JG 52. The first Kommandeur of this Gruppe was Wolf Graf von Houwald whose Christian name gave rise to the wolf emblem.

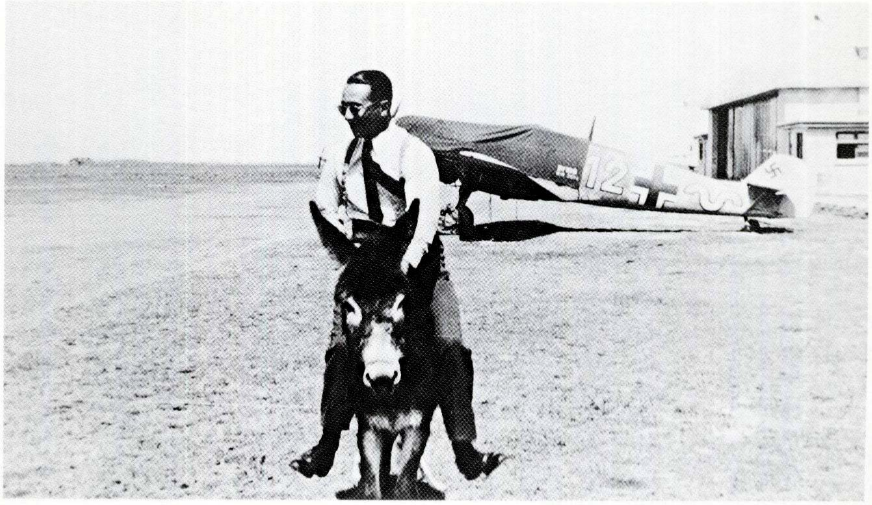
ABOVE: The Running Wolf badge of III./JG 52.

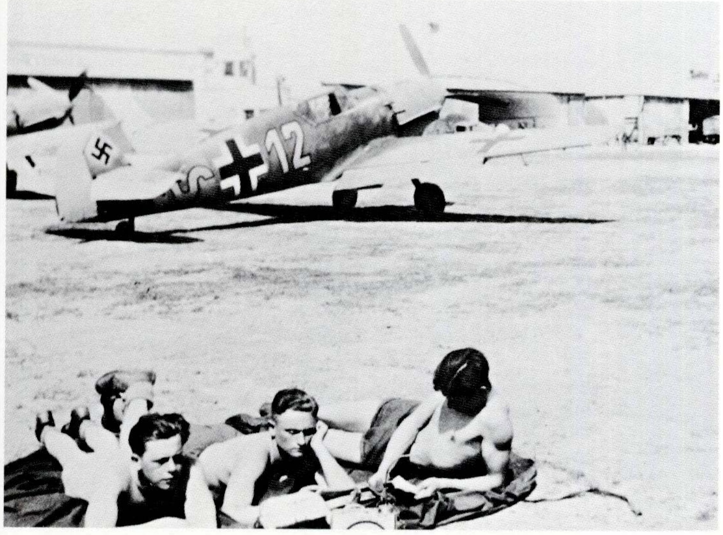
LEFT: Refuelling a Bf 109 E of III./JG 52 in Rumania, Spring 1941.

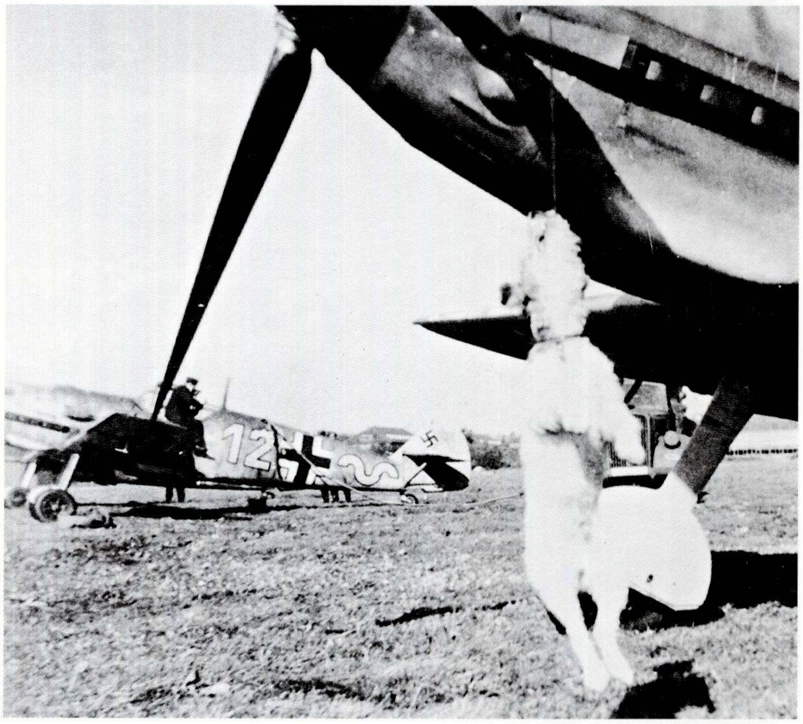


RIGHT: Bf 109 E 'Yellow 4' of 9./JG 52 in the Spring of 1941 displaying a scheme similar to the Wellenmuster, or wave type camouflage, seen later in the war.

RIGHT: Hauptmann Erwin Bacsila of 7./JG 52 was originally a member of the Austrian Air Force which, after the Anschluss of 1938, was taken over by the Luftwaffe. He flew first with II./ZG 1 and was then promoted Kapitän of the night-fighter Staffel 11.(N)/LG 2 before becoming Staffelkapitän of 7./JG 52 in September 1940. Here, Bacsila is seen aboard a traditional means of transport in the Balkans. The aircraft in the background is Bf 109 E, W.Nr. 3214, 'White 12' of 7./JG 52 and the photograph was taken at Pipera in Rumania in the Spring of 1941.



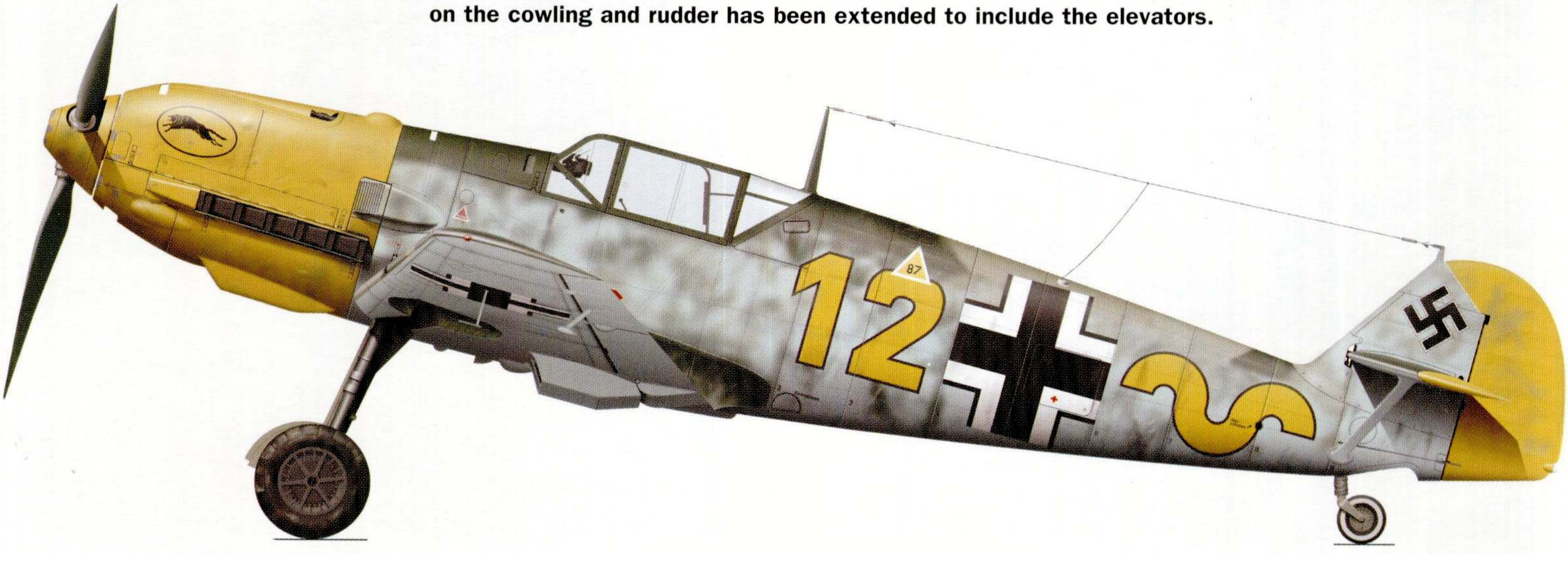


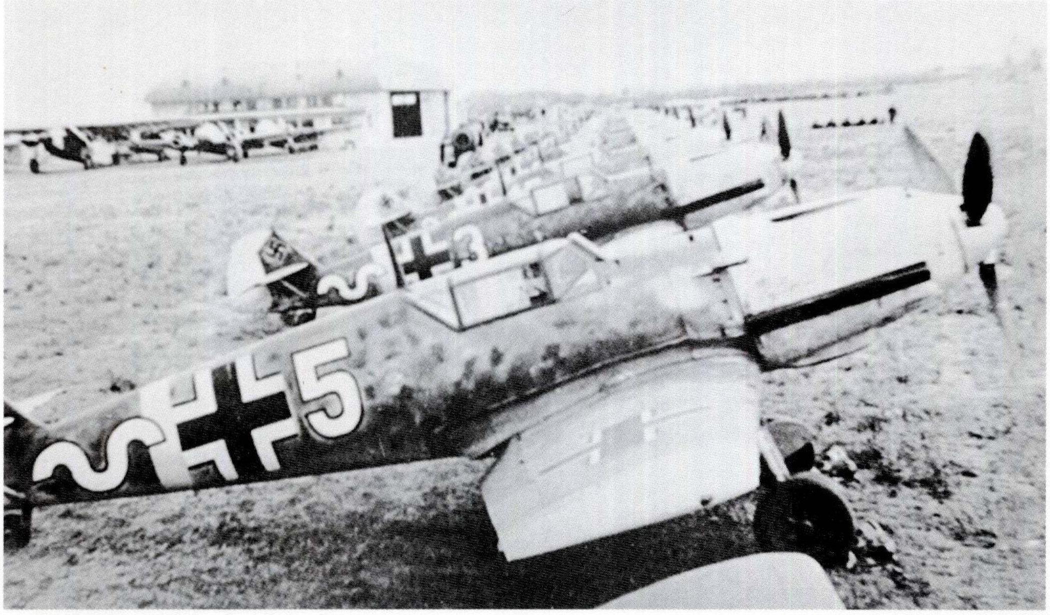


ABOVE AND RIGHT: Looking almost identical in monochrome to 'White 12' above is 'Yellow 12' of 9./JG 52, also photographed at Pipera, Spring 1941. The figure '2' in the code number, however, shows subtle differences when compared with 'White 12'.

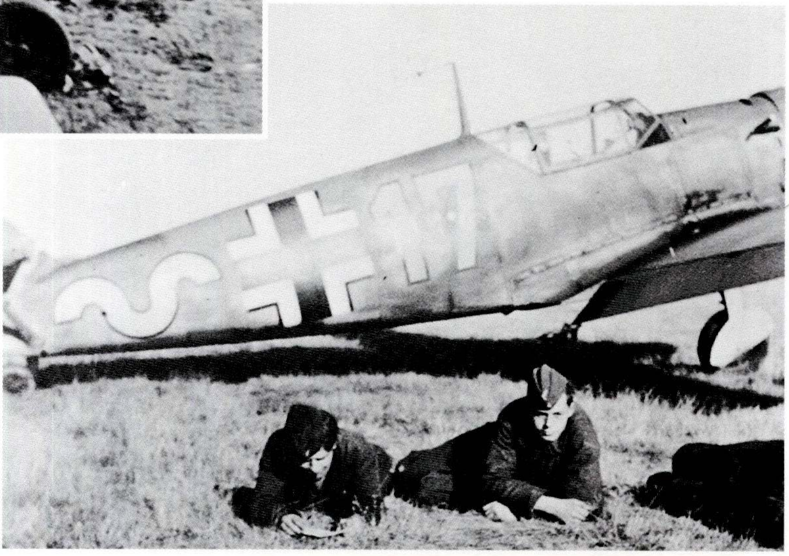
Messerschmitt Bf 109 E-1 'Yellow 12' of 9./JG 52, Pipera, Spring 1941

This aircraft retains its original MG 17 wing armament but has been updated with a later, square canopy and curved head armour. The camouflage consists of an 02/71 scheme in a splinter pattern on the wing, tail and fuselage uppersurfaces with mottled fuselage sides. On this aircraft, the yellow on the cowling and rudder has been extended to include the elevators.

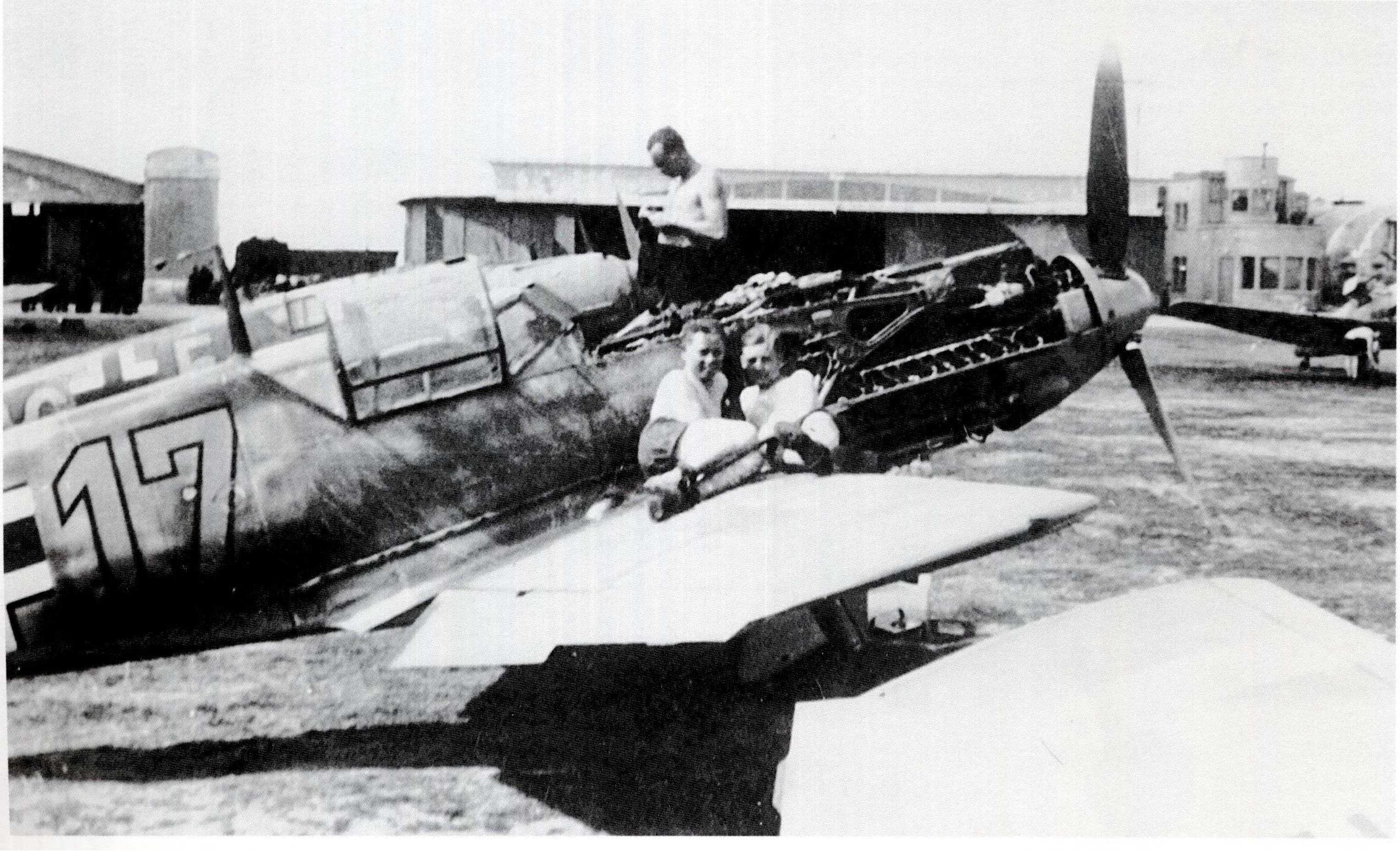




LEFT: Bf 109 E-1s of I./JG 28 (III./JG 52) lined up at Kabaracie airfield in Rumania, early 1941.

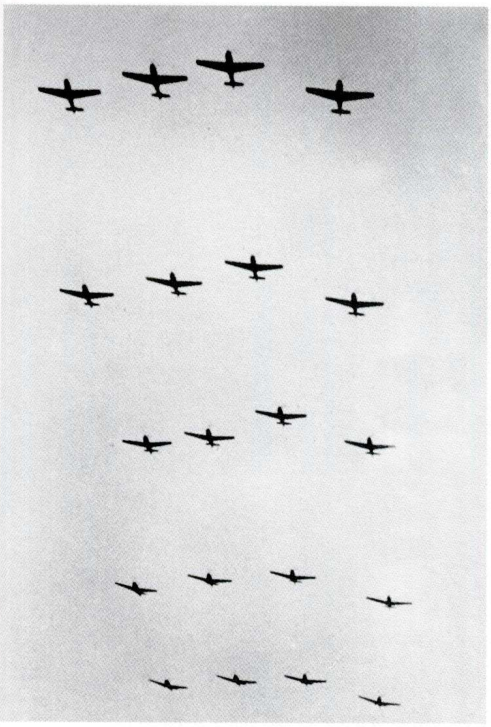


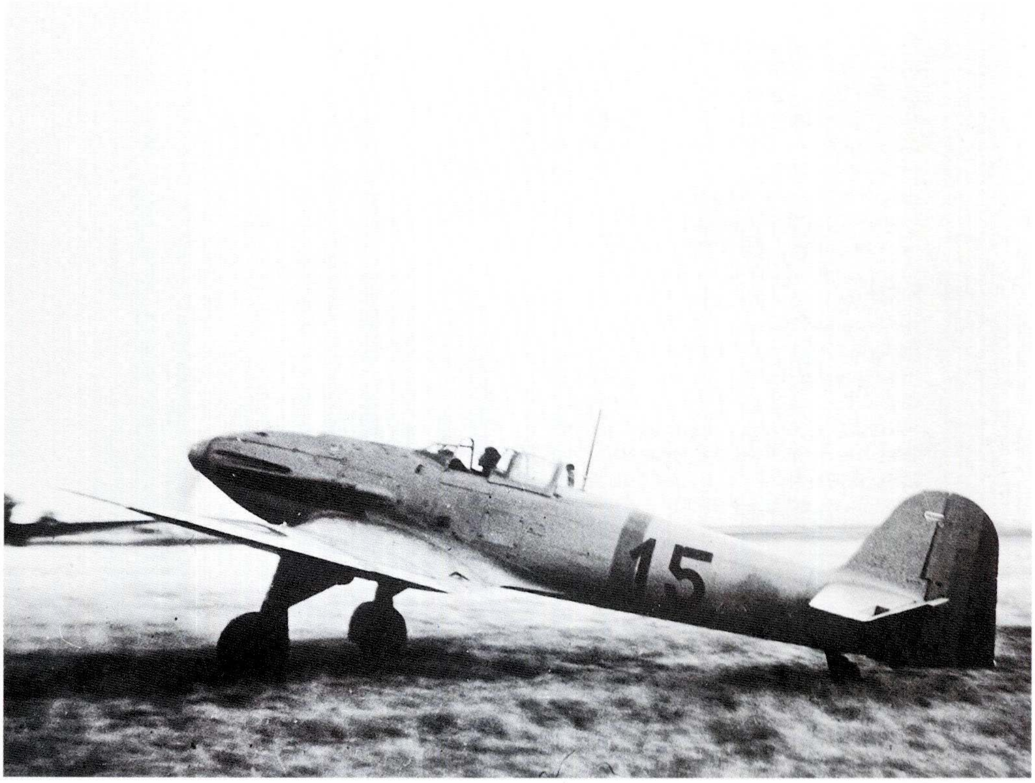
RIGHT AND BELOW: 'Bereitschaft am Sonntag'. A Bf 109 E-1, 'Yellow 17' of 9./JG 52, at readiness on a Sunday in the Spring of 1941. (*BELOW*) Another view of 'Yellow 17'. In the background, the number and wavy Gruppe bar on 'Yellow 5' seem non-standard.



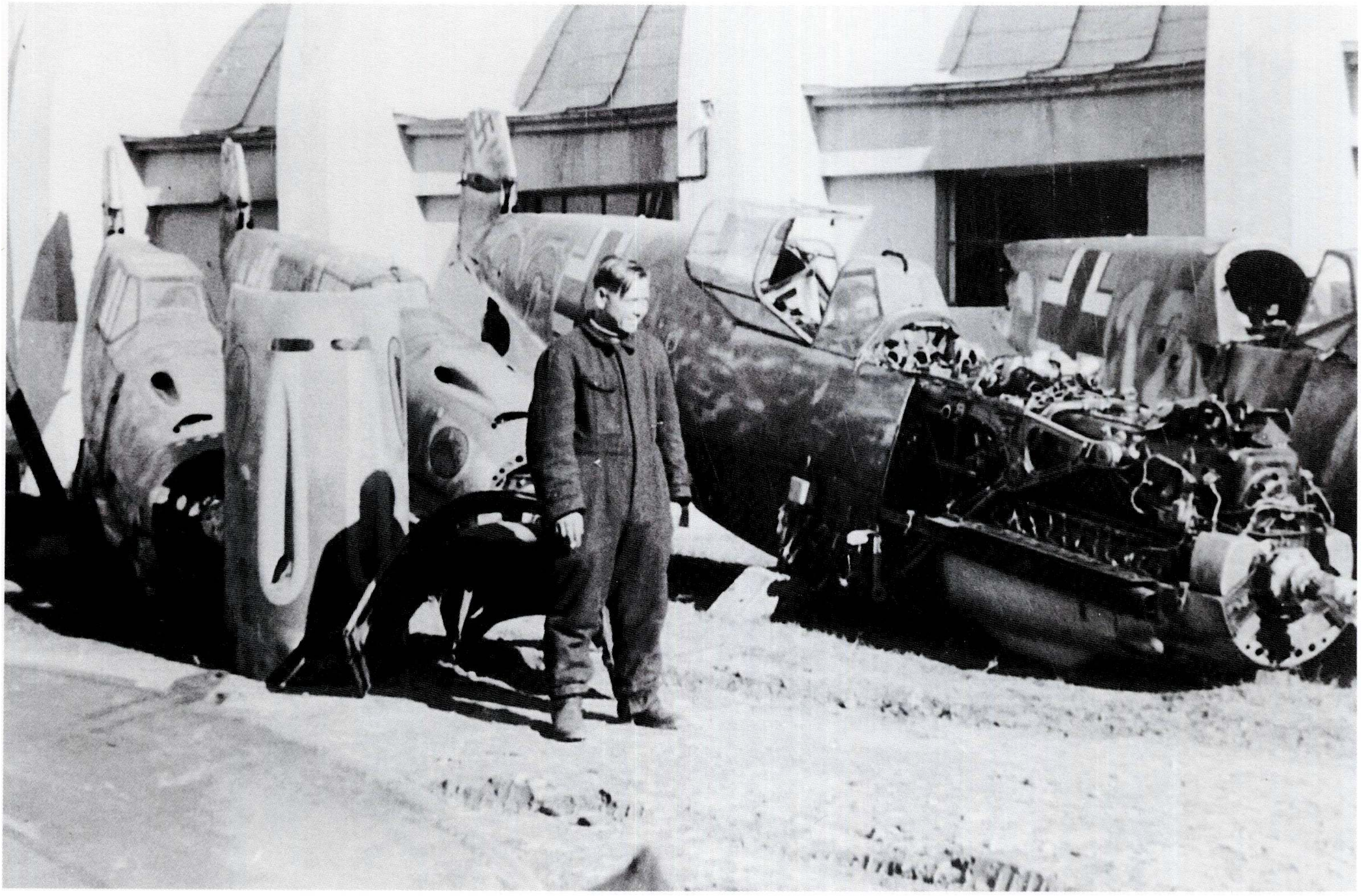
RIGHT: An He 112 in early Rumanian markings, photographed after landing at Pipera.

BELOW: A formation flypast of Bf 109 Es from I./JG 28.

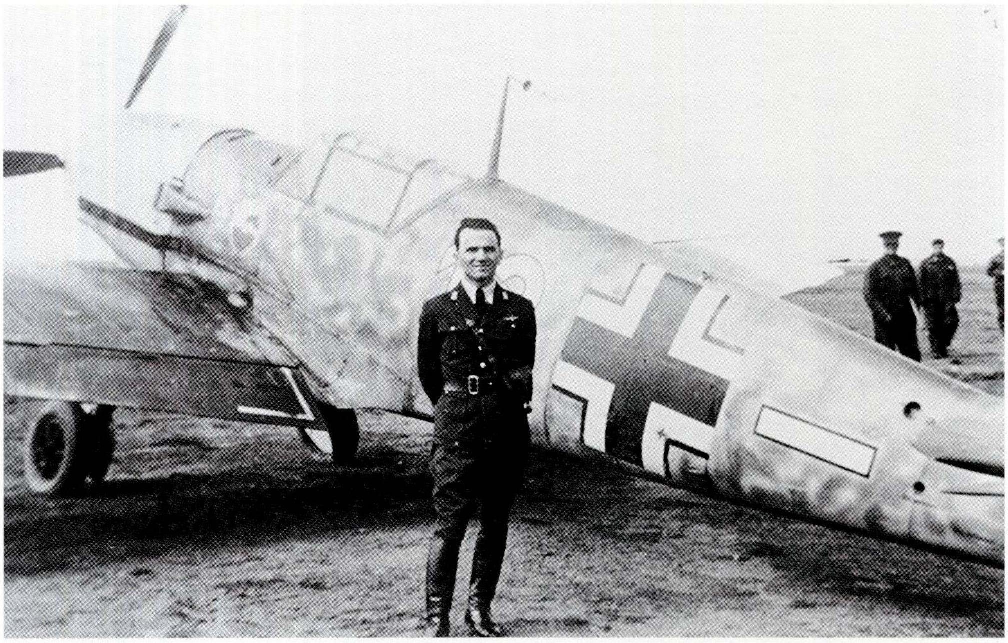


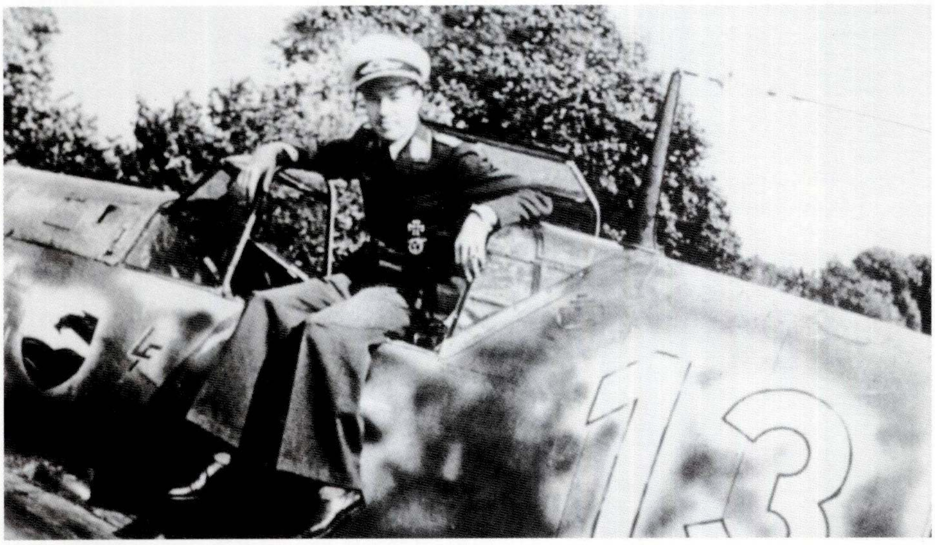


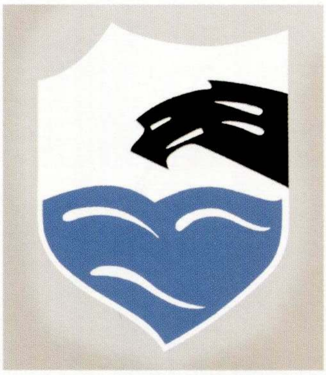
BELOW: Damaged Bf 109 Es of III./JG 52 assembled in Bucharest in 1941, shortly before the Gruppe departed to take part in the Balkan campaign. Note the two different types of canopy and the up-ended engine cowling, left, which shows the machine-gun troughs have been painted yellow. Also visible on several of the engine cowlings is the Running Wolf badge of III./JG 52.



RIGHT AND BELOW: A Rumanian officer posing in front of 'White 13', the aircraft normally flown by Hptm. Helmut Henz, Staffelkapitän of 4./JG 77. This aircraft carried no fuselage band, but the pilot's personal marking, LF, probably the initials of his wife or girlfriend, are just visible aft of the Gruppe's famous Seeadler badge. (*BELOW*) This earlier photograph of the same aircraft, taken in June 1940 when the Staffel was based on the island of Herdla in Norway, is included to show details of the aircraft not visible in the photograph (*RIGHT*). At this time the cowling was still in its normal camouflage colours and had not yet been painted yellow. Oblt. Helmut Henz is seated on the cockpit sill and his LF marking is clearly visible below the windscreen. Another view of the same aircraft may be found on Page 338, Volume 1, Section 4.

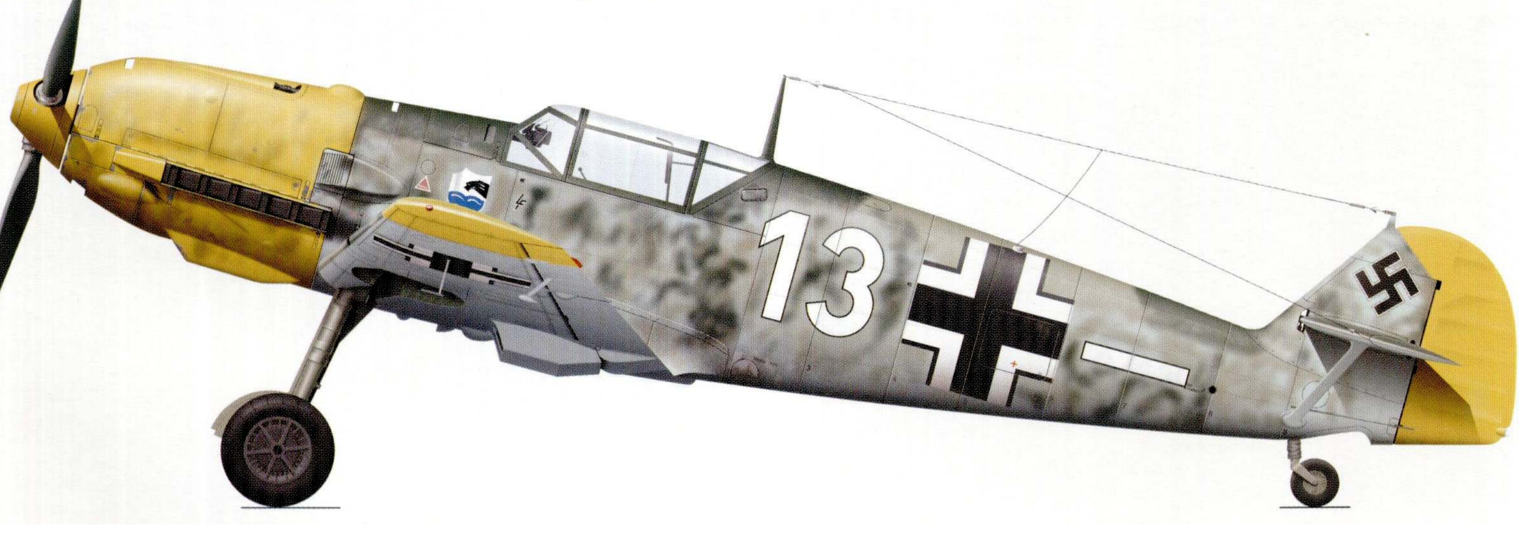






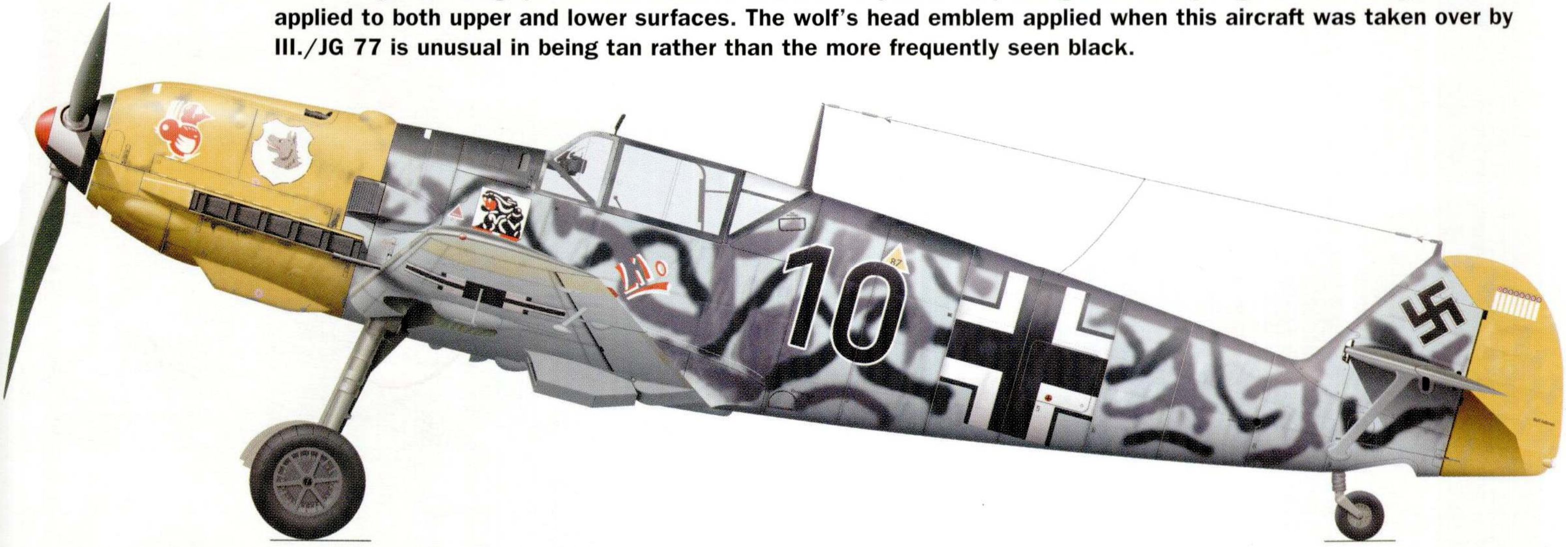
II./JG 77 emblem

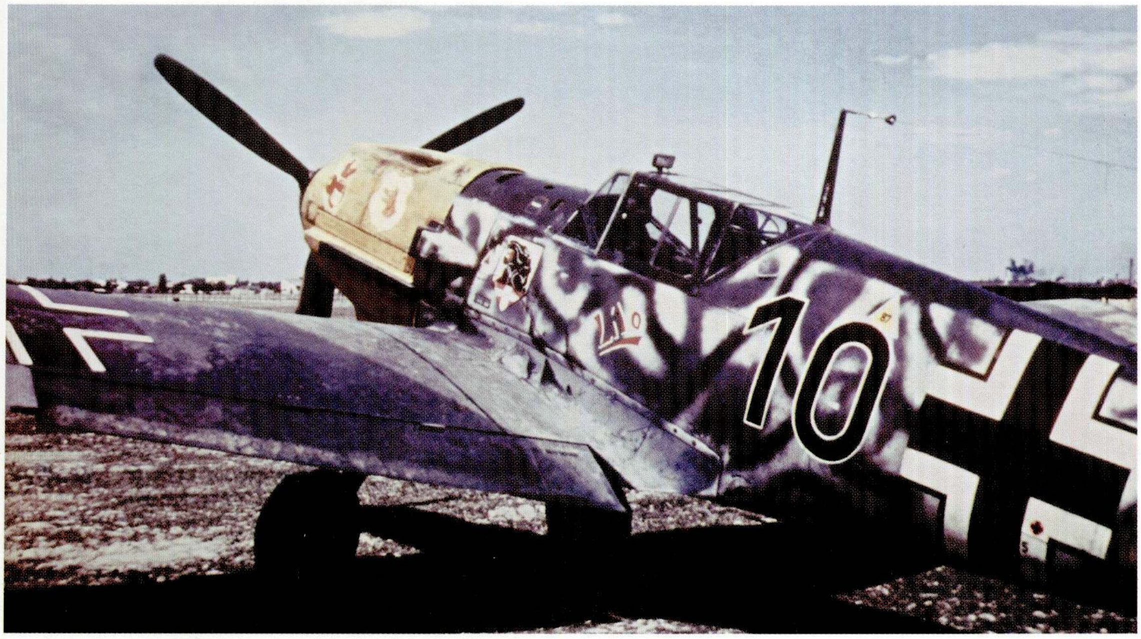
Messerschmitt Bf 109 E-1 'White 13' flown by Hptm. Helmut Henz, Staffelkapitän of 4./JG 77
'White 13 ' was finished in a 71/02/65 scheme which included mottles in these colours on the fuselage sides. The badge of II./JG 77 appeared on the forward fuselage and below the cockpit was a personal motif consisting of the overlapping letters L and F. The machine retained a rounded canopy but had been modified to include curved head armour to protect the pilot's head and shoulders during attacks from the rear. Note the additional aerial wire running to the horizontal stabiliser.



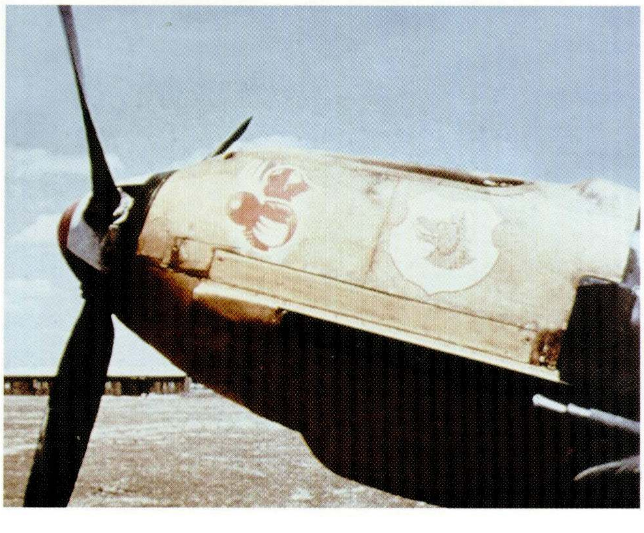
Messerschmitt Bf 109 E-7 'Black 10' of III./JG 77, ex-JG 54, Balkans, May 1941

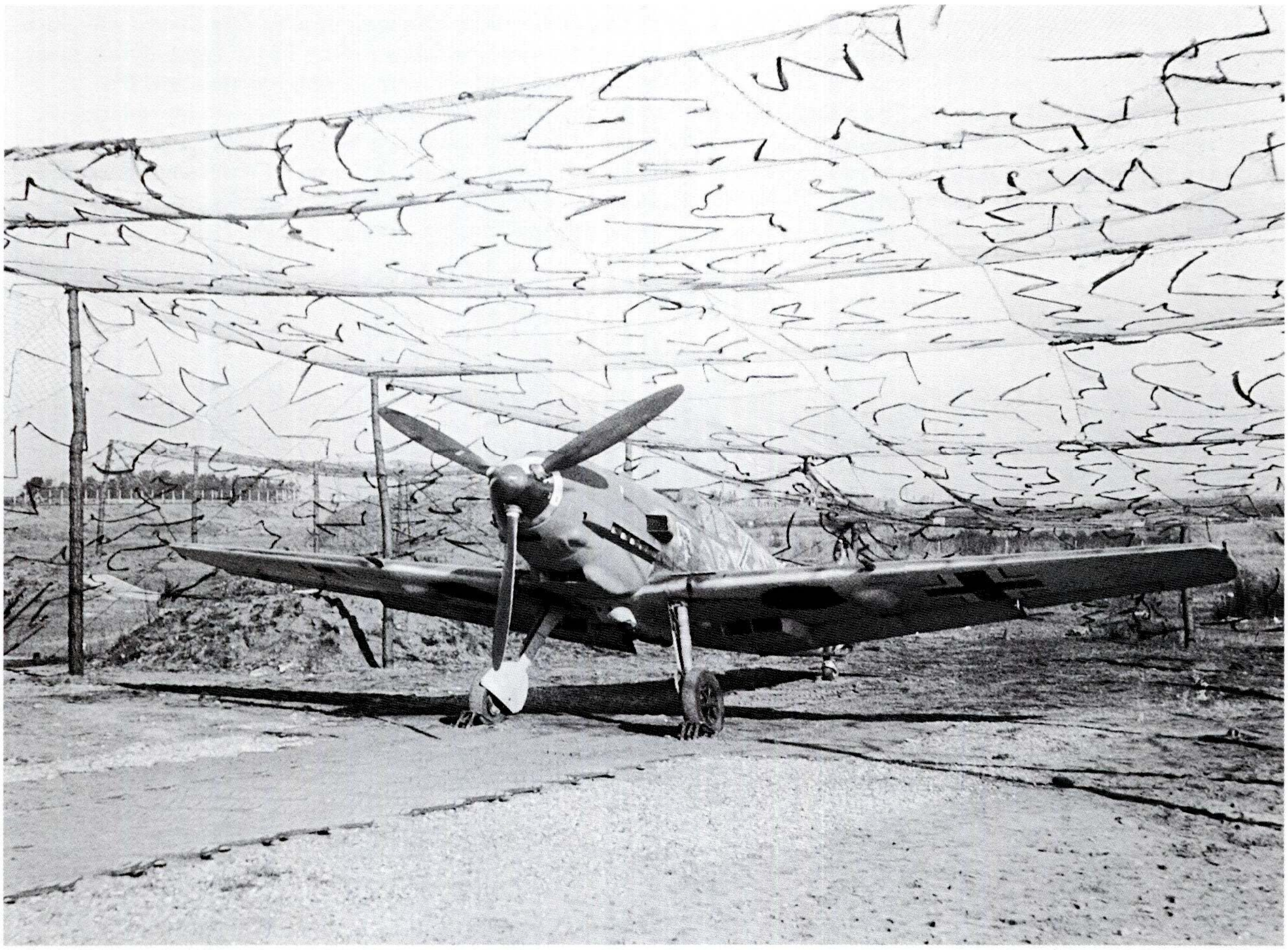
As is evident from the emblems on the nose and ahead of the windscreen, this aircraft originally served with JG 54 and carries one of the camouflage schemes devised by this unit during the latter half of 1940. Eight victory bars are carried on the yellow rudder, and it is believed the first two were capped with French roundels and the remaining six with RAF roundels. The camouflage colours probably consisted of mixed greys with meandering 70 lines enhanced with further grey lines and patches. The name 'Lilo' was painted in red and white under the canopy. Note the yellow wingtips and the remains of a narrow yellow strip along the trailing edge of each wing which was applied to both upper and lower surfaces. The wolf's head emblem applied when this aircraft was taken over by III./JG 77 is unusual in being tan rather than the more frequently seen black.



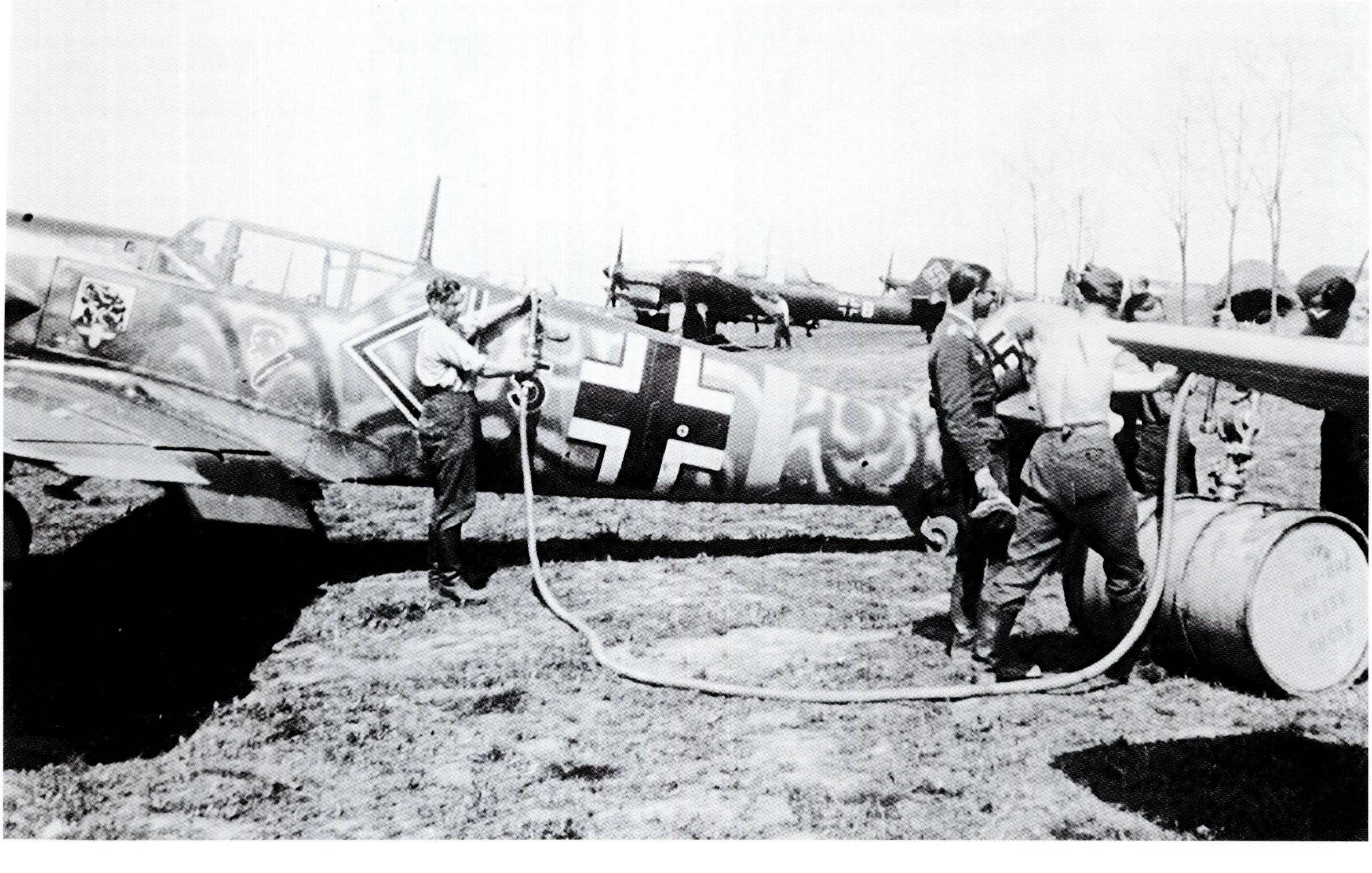


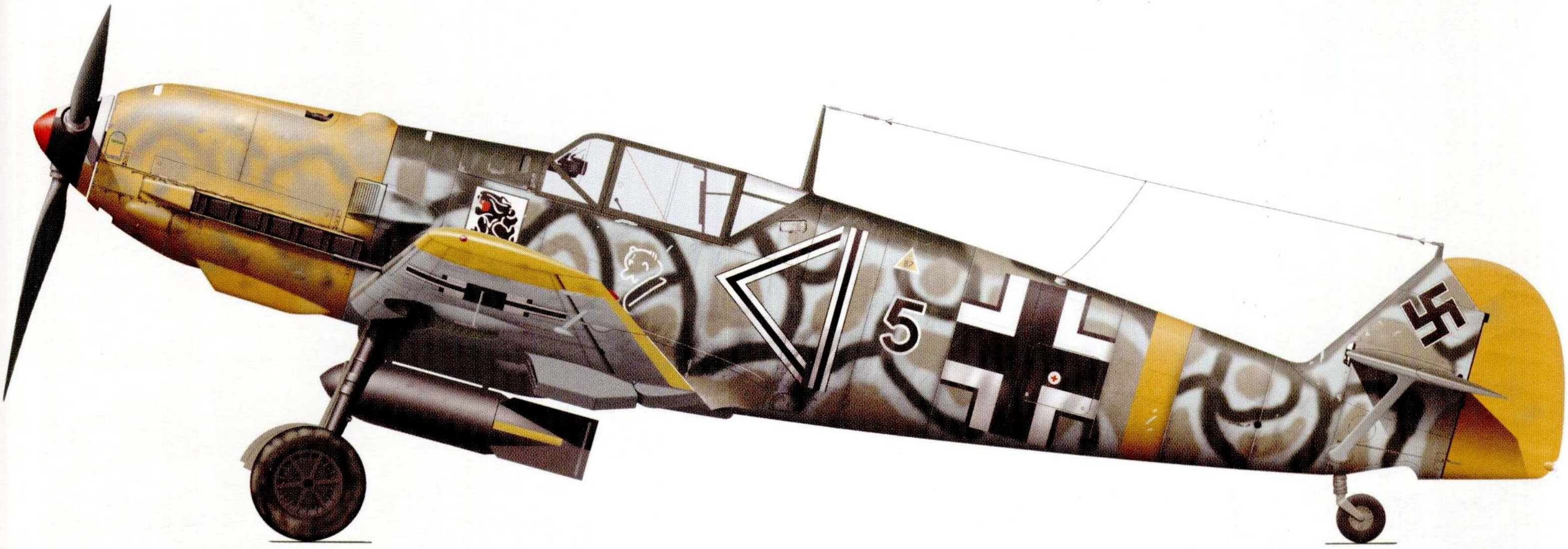
(*THIS PAGE*) To judge from 'The Lion of Aspern' badge under the windscreen, this Bf 109 E-7, 'Black 10', previously served with II./JG 54 before being handed over to III./JG 77. Several sources have stated that this aircraft was previously flown by Oblt. Hubert Mütherich, and the nationality of the kill markings, barely visible (*BELOW RIGHT*), have been interpreted accordingly in the accompanying colour profile. Unexplained, however, is the fact that although Mütherich was the Staffelkapitän of 5./JG 54, the machine clearly has the badge of 8./JG 54, i.e. part of III Gruppe, on its engine cowling. Note also the Bf 109 E in the background has the black triangle of II.(S)/LG 2. (*BELOW LEFT*) The same machine clearly showing the badge of 8./JG 54.





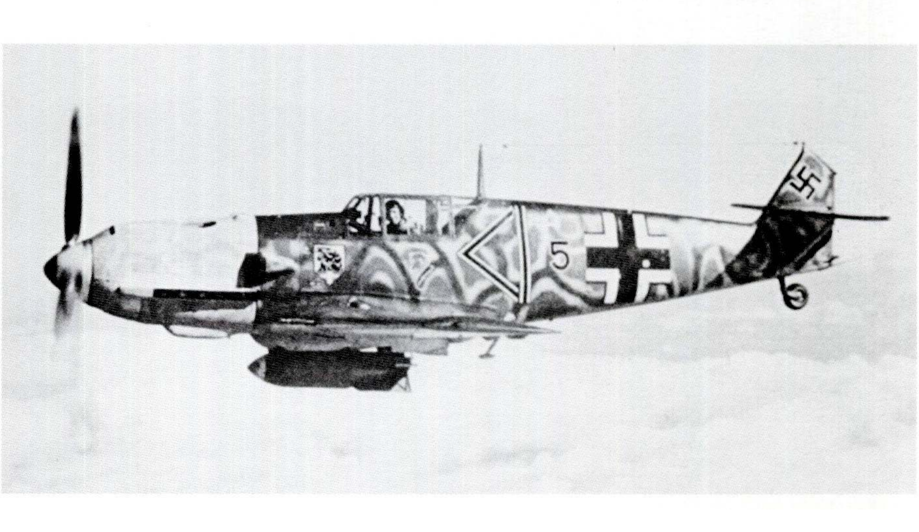
THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE: While many aircraft were written off relatively early in their service lives, this machine evidently soldiered on for quite some time. Assigned to Stab II./JG 54, it was photographed (*LEFT*) under camouflage nets, probably at Campagne, in Autumn 1940, complete with ETC rack and a newly painted yellow cowling. The machine later went to Rumania (*BELOW AND OPPOSITE TOP RIGHT*) where it is seen at Arad being refuelled. The yellow areas have now been extended to include a narrow fuselage band, wingtips and the trailing edges of the wings. This aircraft survived to take part in the Russian campaign and is seen here (*OPPOSITE BELOW RIGHT*) being flown on the Northern Front by Lt. Heindl.





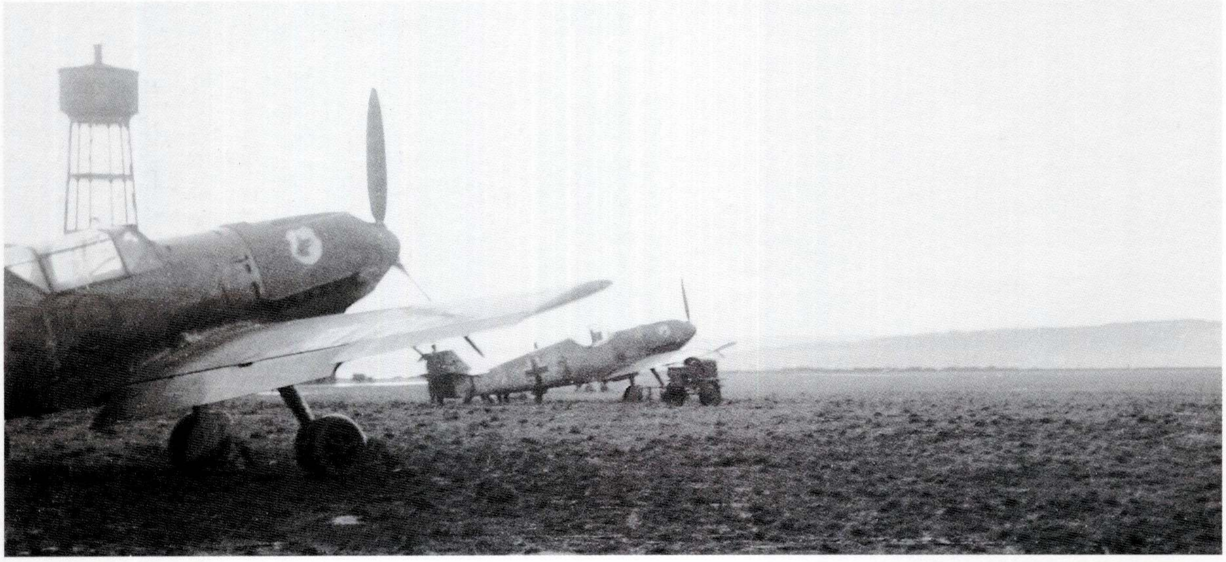
Messerschmitt Bf 109 E-4/B of Stab II./JG54, Arad, Rumania, early 1941

The camouflage on this aircraft consisted of a dark, high demarcation 71/02 scheme over 65 with meandering 71 lines and 02 patches. The spinner, which has a red cap, is halved white and green, with the backplate halved in white and yellow. When seen at Arad, the yellow on the nose was beginning to fade and there were signs of the original camouflage showing through. All markings and national insignia, including the swastika, had the appearance of being applied after the camouflage.

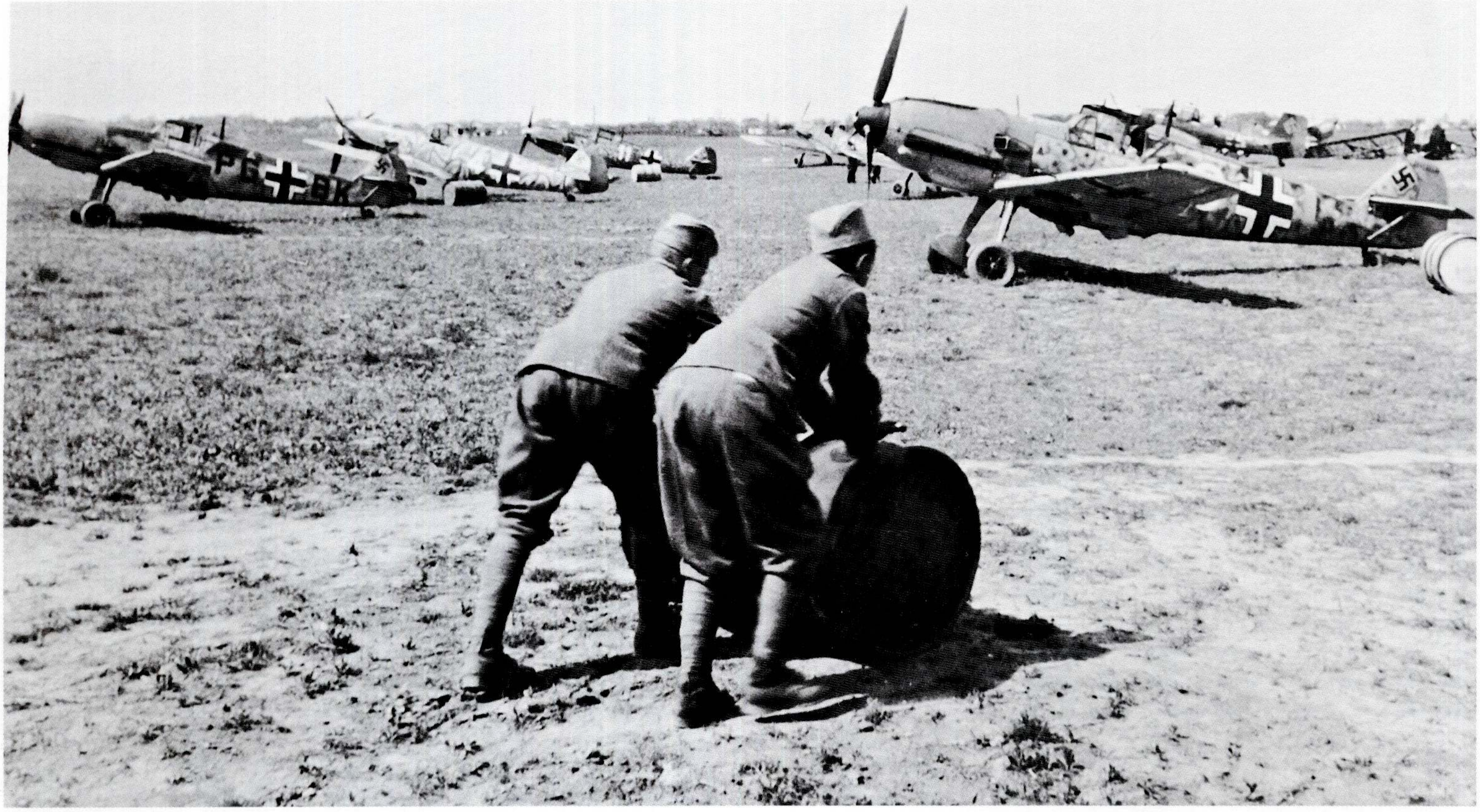


RIGHT: Hptm. Wolfgang Lippert, Gruppenkommandeur of II./JG 27, in Bulgaria, early 1941, seen here sporting decidedly English headwear.

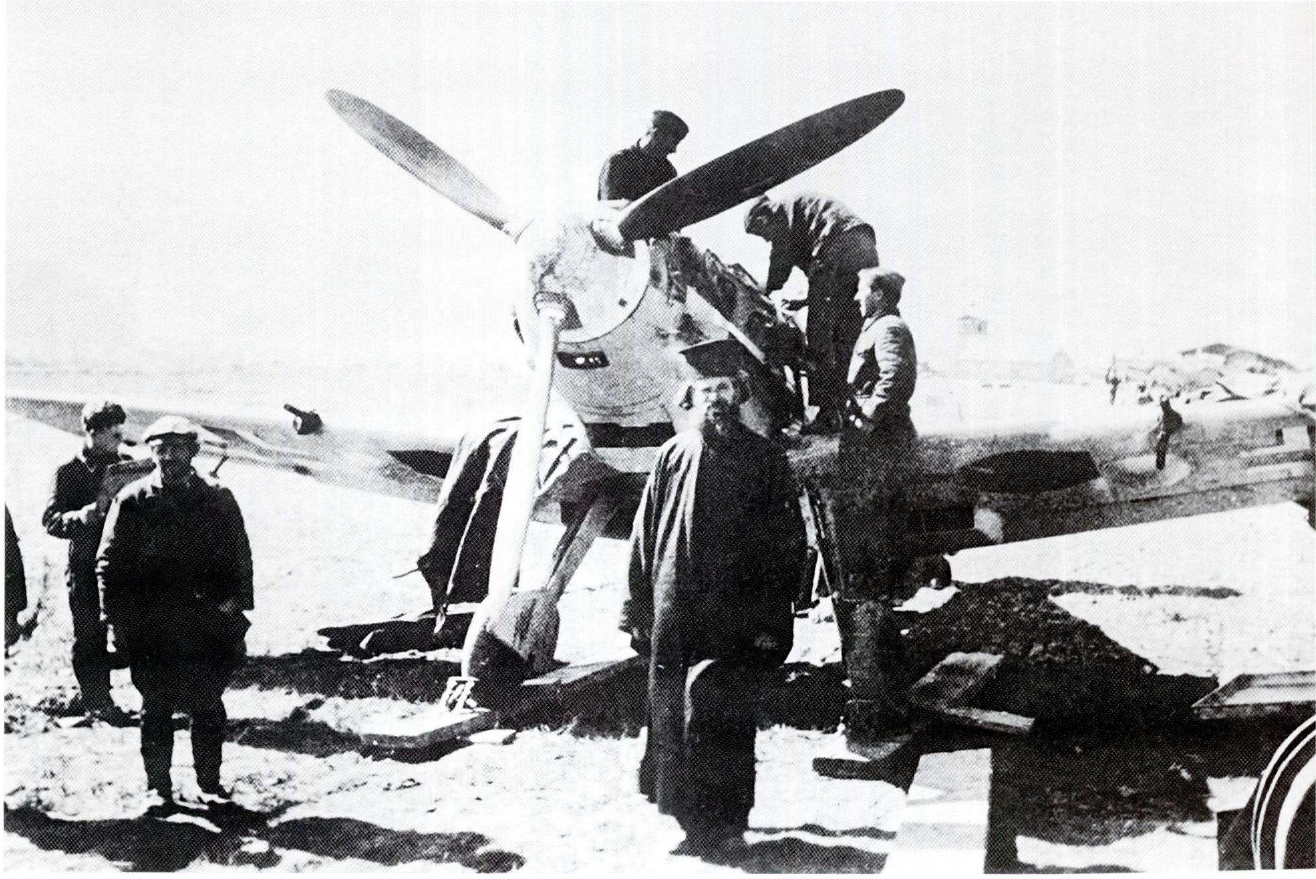
BELOW: Aircraft of III./JG 77 seen soon after they arrived at Deta and shortly before the campaign in the Balkans. The wolf's head badge of III. Gruppe is plainly visible on the nose, but less obvious is the 'Curly Head' emblem of 9. Staffel under the cockpit.



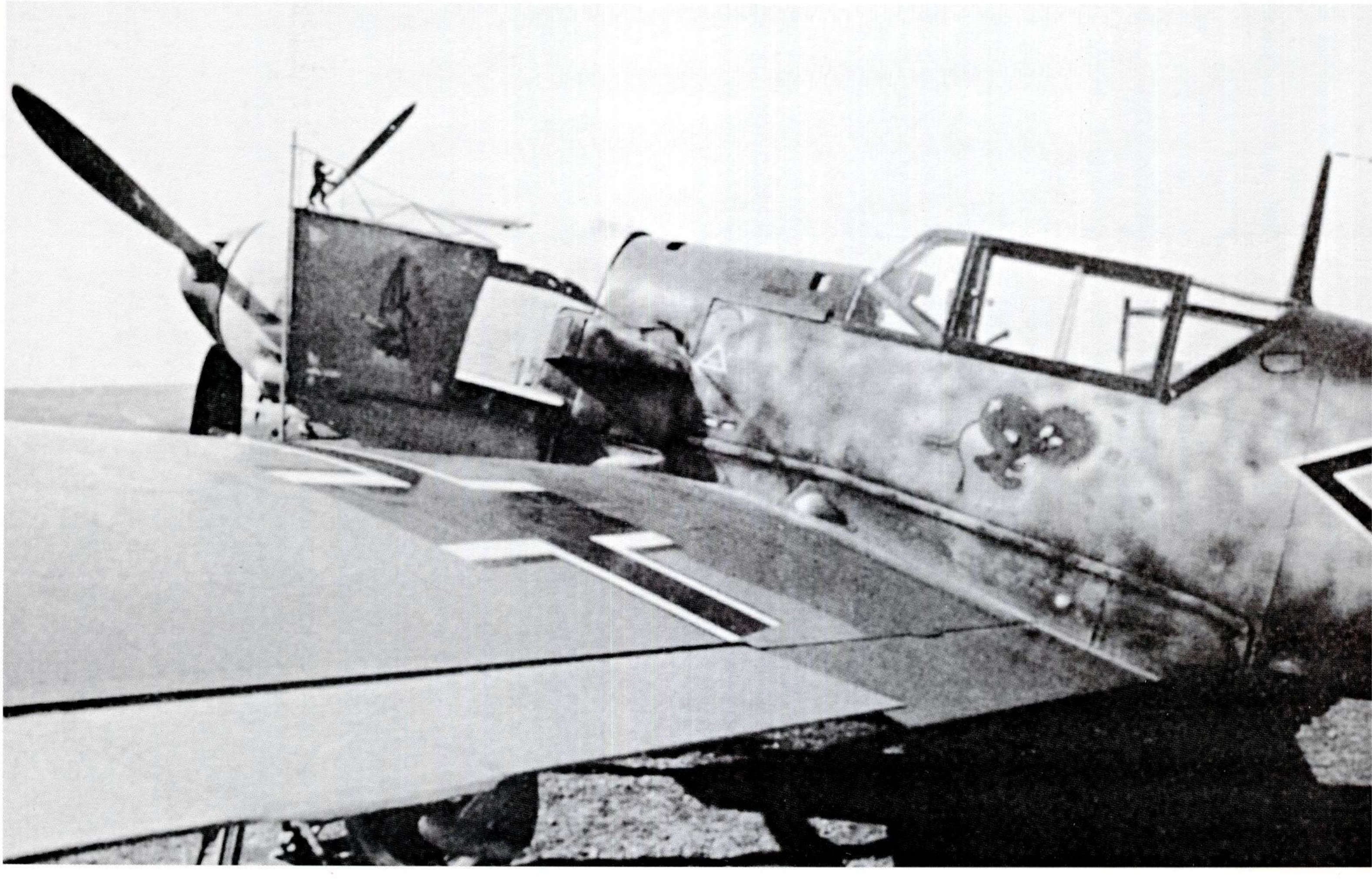
BELOW: An airfield scene at Arad with Rumanian ground personnel helping to refuel the Bf 109 Es of III./JG 54. The aircraft on the far left still retains its factory code, a not infrequent occurrence in front-line units when an urgent need to put aircraft into service or insufficient opportunity prevented ground crews from applying unit identification numbers and emblems.



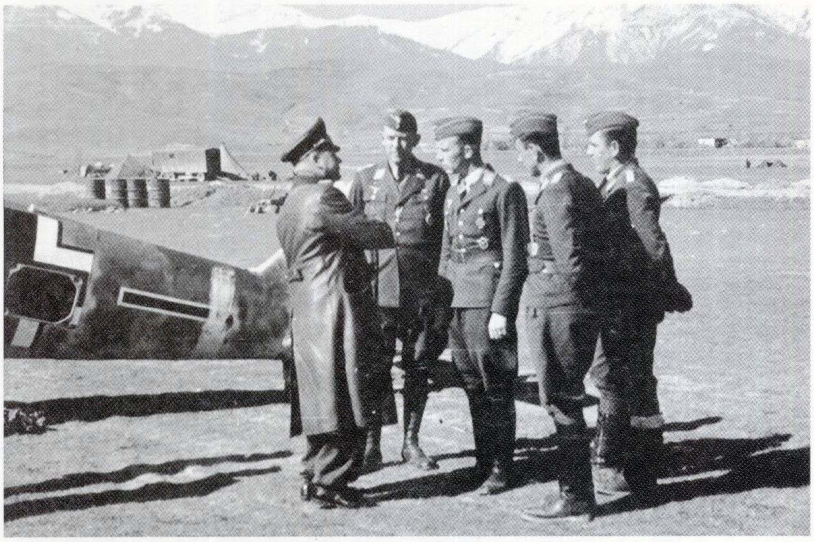
RIGHT: An Orthodox priest visiting 7./JG 27 in Bulgaria. The Bf 109's spinner has been painted white, the Staffel's colour, but is showing signs of wear.

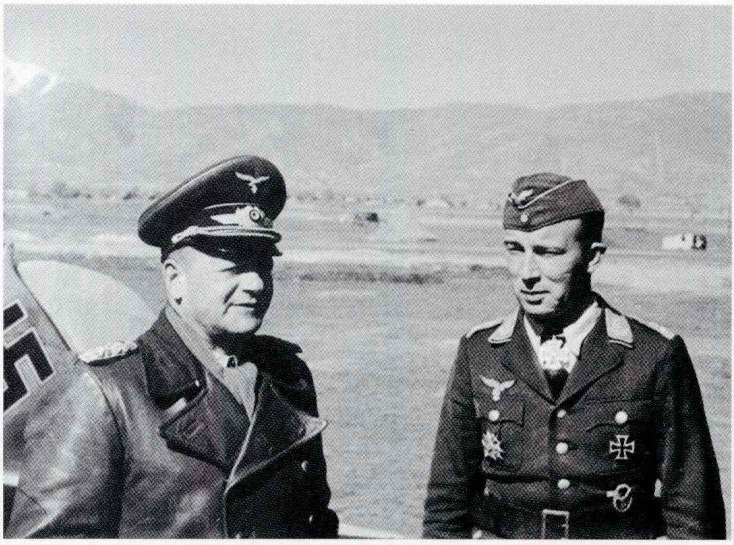


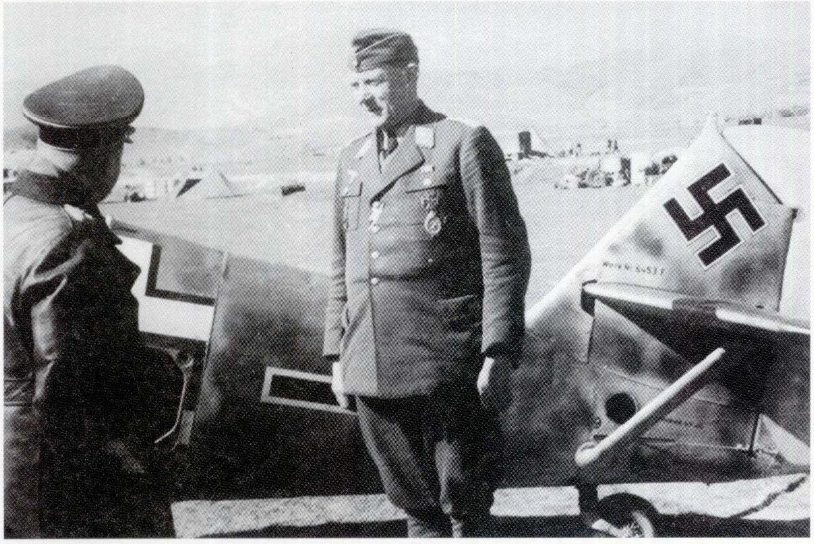
BELOW: The Bf 109 E operated by the Stab of II./JG 27 in the Balkans showing the badge of the Gruppenstab. The already battered lion with an adhesive bandage applied to its buttocks, representative of Great Britain, is about to receive another wound to his rear.

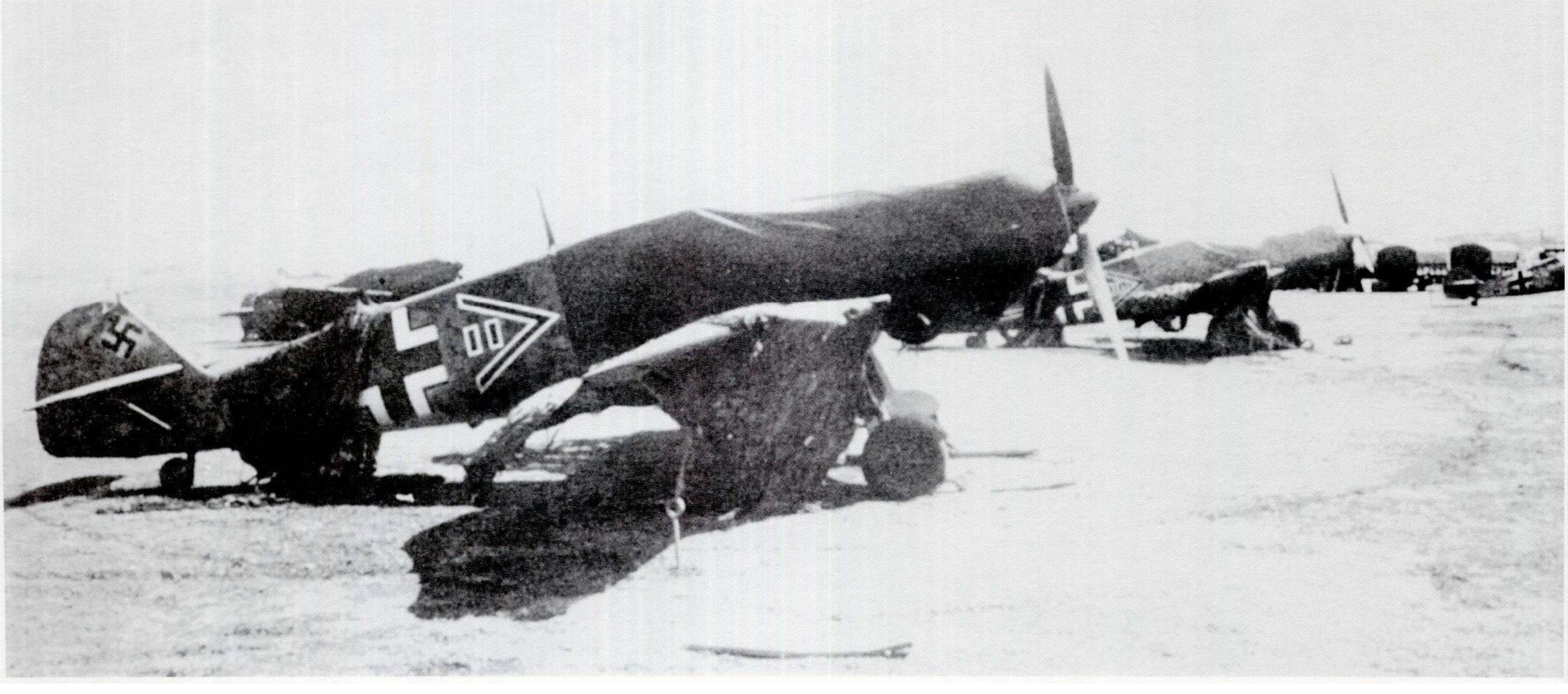


THIS PAGE: At some time during March or April 1941, Feldmarschall Erhard Milch visited II./JG 27 at Strumatal in Bulgaria and in this series of photographs, he is seen in conversation with Hptm. Wolfgang Lippert (*TOP RIGHT*), Kommandeur of II./JG 27. Note the crudely applied fuselage stripe (*TOP LEFT*) on the Bf 109 E, W.Nr. 6453F, in the background, which appears to have been drawn on with chalk. Most unusual, too, are the Stab markings which appear to consist of a single chevron and two small vertical bars. Although also observed at a different time and location (*BOTTOM*), the significance of this combination is not known.









"Everyone wanted to have a pilot staying with him..."

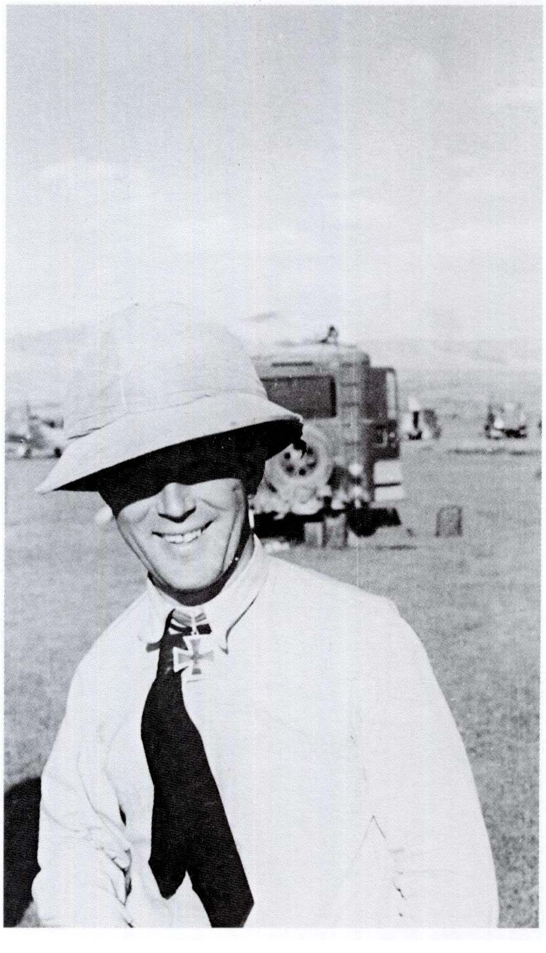
J. Emil Clade

In 1941 I was ordered to transfer twelve Me 109s from Bucharest in Rumania to Plovdiv which is east of Sofia, in Bulgaria. There was no contact with the units there and no intelligence report; not even a weather report, which is important for such a mission, was available. When the *Staffel* took off, the weather was good and we had almost reached our objective when we came across the Stara Planina mountains running diagonally across our course. The mountain peaks were completely hidden in cloud and there were no breaks from which we could take a look at the terrain. To fly any further straight into the cloud without sight of the unfamiliar mountains would have been lunacy. Perhaps, if I had been flying alone, I might have taken a chance, but with eleven other aircraft the risk was just too great. Then, for an instant, I caught sight of the ground below and quickly lost height to search for a suitable field. I landed alone to find out what the ground was like and, once I was satisfied, I used the radio to guide my comrades down to land.

Naturally, our landing was observed in the neighbouring village, and we had hardly climbed out of our aircraft than we were surrounded by half the local population. We were the first Germans to set foot in this area as the ground forces had only just crossed the border, near the Danube River. In such a situation one could not be certain whether things would develop positively or negatively, but in this case the people were very friendly and were happy that finally something was going on. A captain of the reserve reported to us, a university professor who had studied in Germany and spoke German without any accent. With his assistance, our group was distributed among the villagers for the night. Everyone wanted to have a pilot staying with him, which of course was impossible. I was quartered with the mayor, and we were assured that nothing would happen to our aircraft, which was indeed the case.

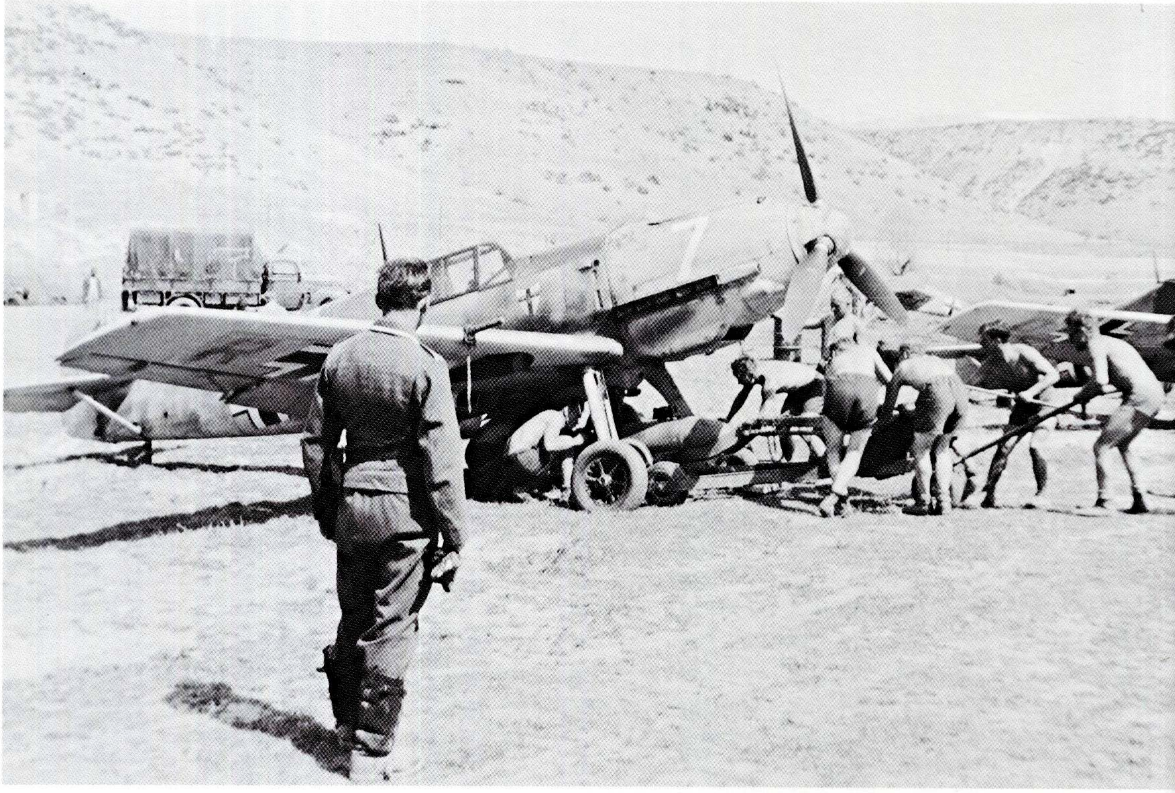
The next day, as we had no other way of communicating with German bases in Rumania, I sent a telegraph message from the nearest railway station to the airfield in Bucharest. This airfield had already reported that our twelve Me 109s had gone missing on the way to Sofia but, as a result of this telegram, some Bulgarian aviation fuel was ordered so that we could refuel our aircraft. This, however, proved unsuitable for the Me 109. After two days, two Ju 52 transport aircraft arrived with German aviation fuel and landed in the field right next to us. My *Staffel* eventually arrived in Plovdiv with all aircraft undamaged and in time to participate in the invasion of Greece. I did not take part in the campaign myself, however, and was posted to a training unit as a *Jagdlehrer*.

LEFT: Major Wolfgang Schellmann, Kommodore of JG 27, at Strumatal in Bulgaria. The sun helmet is not the standard-issue Luftwaffe item, as this did not appear until mid-1941. The officer on the right is Hptm. Wolfgang Lippert of II./JG 27, the Gruppe emblem of which may be seen on the vehicle parked in the background.

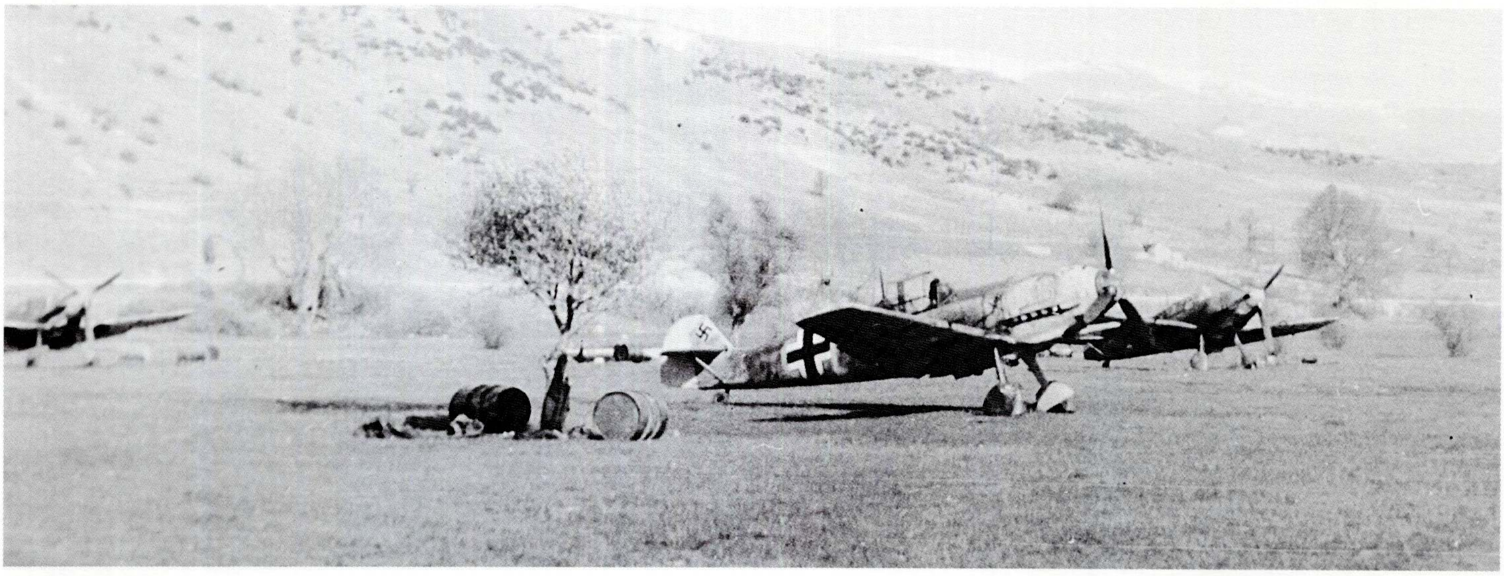


RIGHT: Hptm. Wolfgang Lippert, Kommandeur of II./JG 27 at Strumatal, in sun helmet. His Knight's Cross was awarded on 24 September 1940.

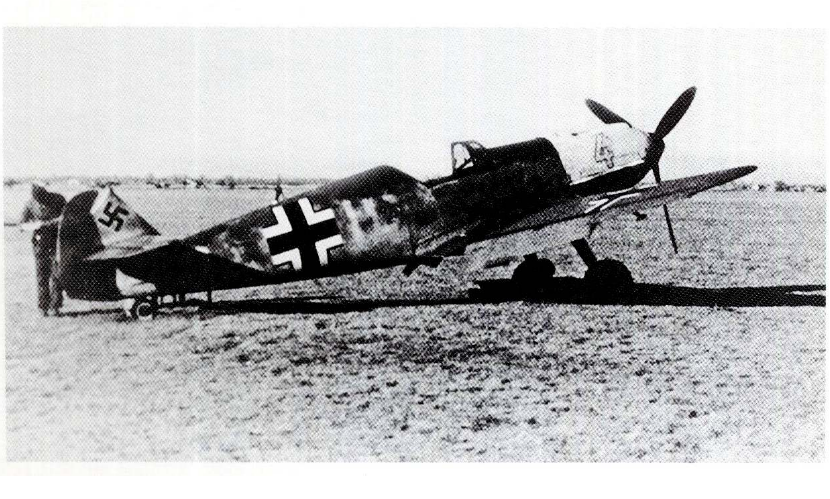
RIGHT: 'White 7' of 7./JG 27 being loaded with a 250 kg bomb at Belica-Strumatal.

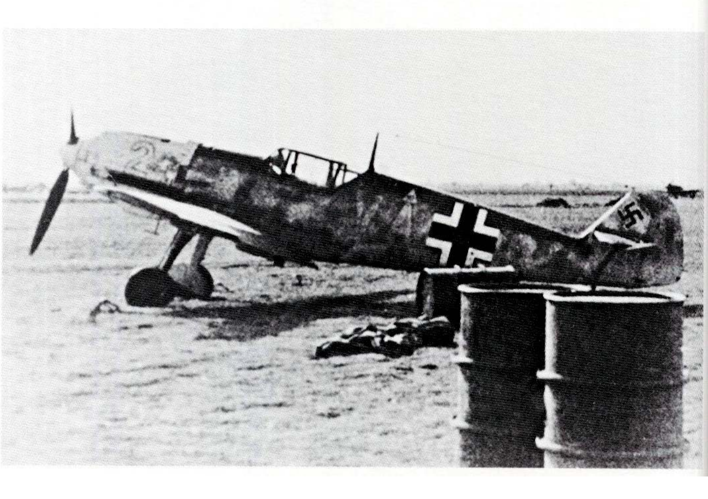


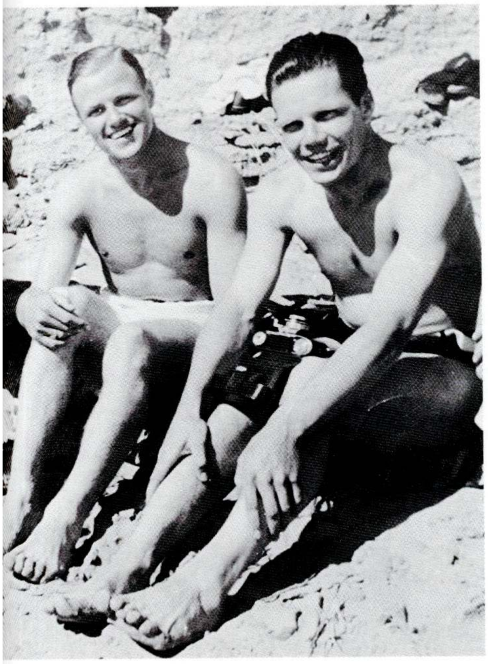
BELOW: Aircraft of 9./JG 27 photographed at readiness at Belica-Strumatal, Bulgaria, on 6 April 1941, shortly before taking off to attack the Metaxas Line. The Metaxas Line of fortifications was close to the border with Bulgaria and guarded Macedonia and the Rupel Pass. It was manned by three and a half Greek divisions.



BELOW AND BELOW RIGHT: 'Yellow 4' and 'Yellow 2' were flown by 9./JG 27 and are seen here at the beginning of the Balkan campaign, probably at Belica-Strumatal. The Stammkennzeichen (factory code) on both aircraft is beginning to show through the fuselage camouflage, and 'Yellow 4', which is minus its canopy, has a yellow rudder and white engine cowling. 'Yellow 2' has a single black victory bar on its rudder.

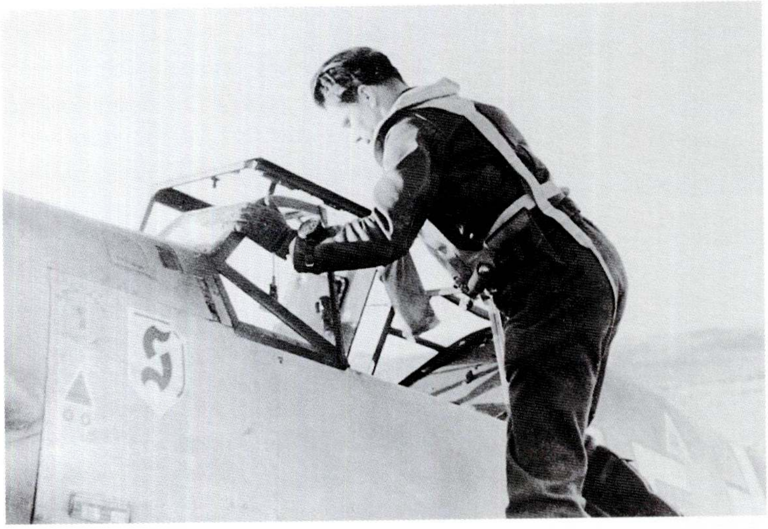


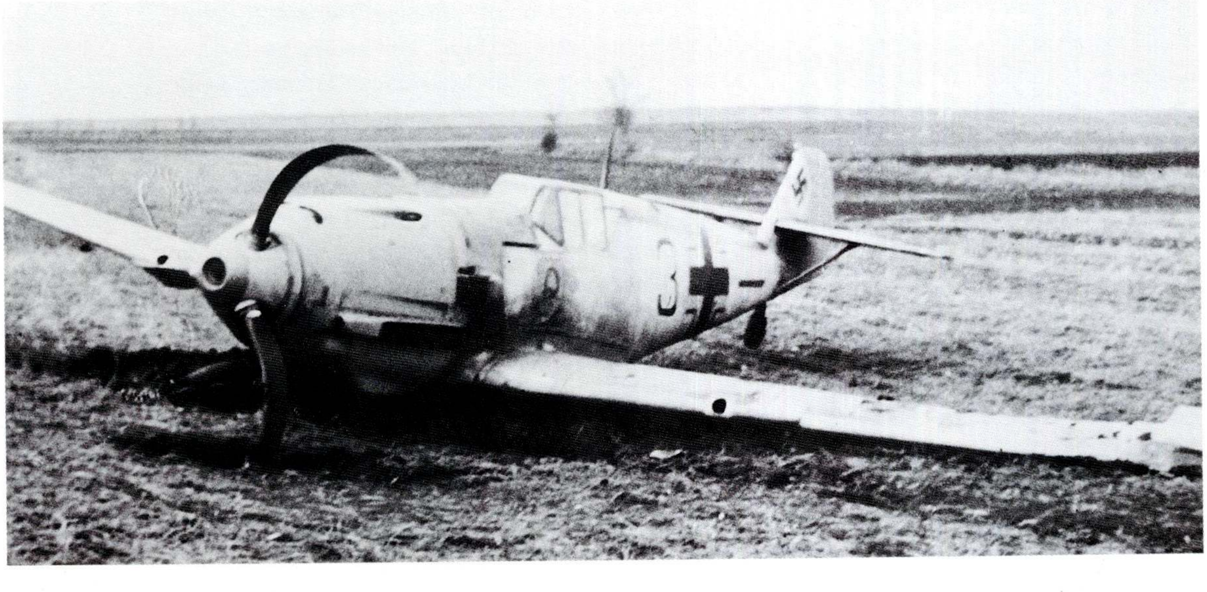




LEFT: 7./JG 26 was in action over Yugoslavia for just one day, after which it returned to its base at Gela airfield in Sicily. This photograph shows the Staffelkapitän, Oblt. Joachim Müncheberg, with Ofw. Ernst Laube, also from 7./JG 26.

RIGHT: Ofw. Ernst Laube of 7./JG 26 entering the cockpit of his Bf 109 E 'White 5' at Gela. Laube ended the war as Kommandeur of IV./JG 4.

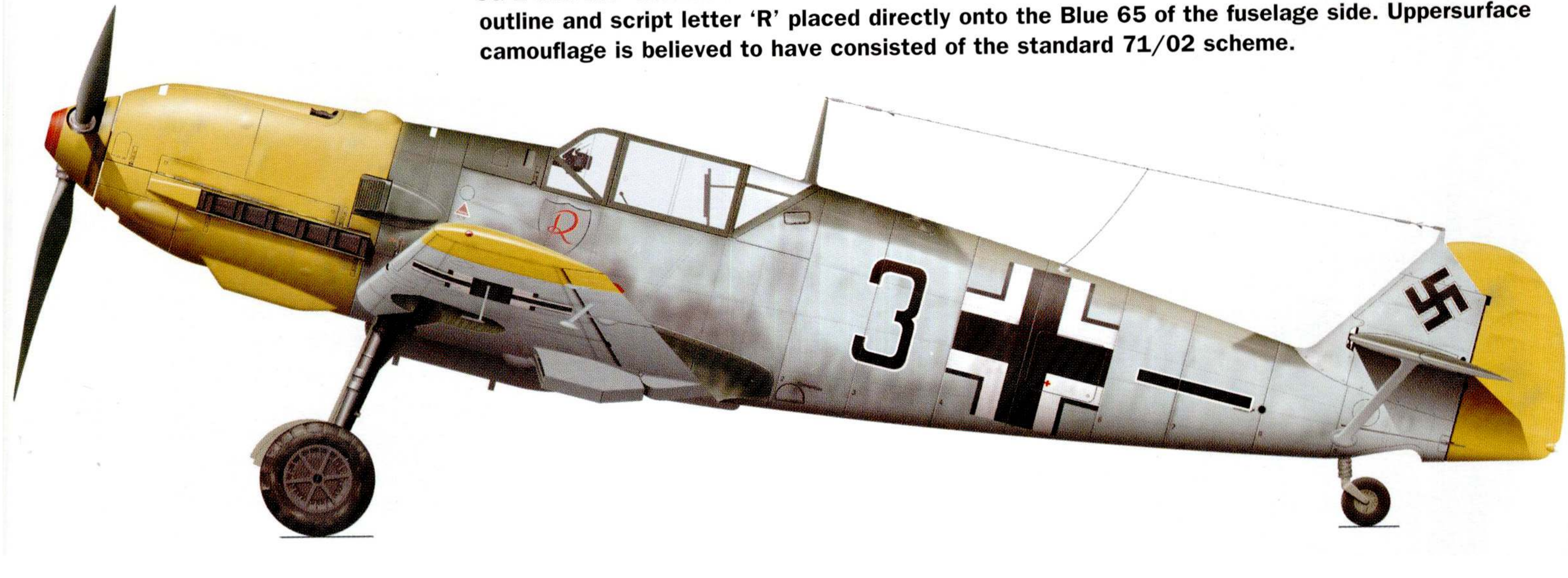




LEFT: The pilot of this Bf 109 E-1, which had previously seen service with JG 2, barely succeeded in reaching Vrba (Sofia) airfield, the base of II./JG 27. Although it clearly bears the horizontal Gruppe bar and 'Richthofen' shield of II./JG 2, when photographed this machine was probably on the strength of III./JG 77 which used aircraft previously flown by I. and II./JG 2, II.(S)/LG 2 and JG 54.

Messerschmitt Bf 109 E-1 'Black 3', probably of III./JG 77, Bulgaria, early 1941

This Bf 109 E-1, which has been fitted with a square canopy and head armour, has a replacement panel covering the fuselage-mounted MG 17s. The aircraft previously served with JG 2 and the 'Richthofen' shield of this unit under the windscreen consists only of the red outline and script letter 'R' placed directly onto the Blue 65 of the fuselage side. Uppersurface camouflage is believed to have consisted of the standard 71/02 scheme.



All Against Greece

Large numbers of fighters were now no longer required in Yugoslavia and on Easter Monday, 14 April 1941, I./JG 27 was recalled to München-Riem prior to the *Gruppe* being transferred to Libya where the exploits of Hans-Joachim Marseille would become legendary. All the remaining German single-engined fighters in Yugoslavia were therefore diverted to Greece where the best pilots were needed to counter increasing activity by the RAF and to administer the *coup de grâce* to British forces. One Bf 109 lost that day was flown by Hans-Joachim Gerlach, *Staffelkapitän* of 6./JG 27, who was shot down by anti-aircraft fire while making strafing attacks near Neapolis. Gerlach baled out but was soon captured by Commonwealth troops who put him aboard a ship bound for North Africa and he spent the rest of the war as a PoW. *Uffz.* Fritz Gromotka of the same *Staffel* claimed a Gladiator, although this cannot be confirmed in RAF records. As the almost encircled Yugoslav troops in Bosnia retreated, a German armoured unit found and freed *Hptm.* Herbert Ihlefeld, the *Kommandeur* of I.(*J*)/LG 2 who had been shot down and captured on the first day of *'Marita'*. Ihlefeld quickly returned to his *Gruppe* and soon resumed command.

A bloodier day for both sides occurred on 15 April when JG 77 attacked the important airfield at Larissa, the base of the Hurricanes of 33 Sqn. The fighters of II./JG 77 carried out strafing attacks and succeeded in destroying some aircraft on the ground, but the Hurricanes had already taken off and an air battle developed. *Lt.* Jakob Arnoldy and *Fw.* Otto Köhler, both of 4./JG 77, each claimed a Hurricane and, indeed, two British fighters were shot down in this engagement, both pilots being killed, but then the two victorious German pilots were themselves shot down. Although *Fw.* Köhler crash-landed some distance from his airfield, he evaded capture and returned to his unit only to be killed on 24 June. However, Arnoldy, an ace of II./JG 77 with six *Luftsiege* in the Norwegian Campaign a year previously, was less fortunate and although precise details of his fate are uncertain, it is known that he was wounded and made an emergency landing on Larissa airfield. One report states that he was then captured but later died of his wounds in a medical tent, but it is possible he was in fact lynched by a crowd of disorderly Greeks or, perhaps, killed by Commonwealth troops. The latter may indeed have been responsible, for it is known that during this campaign a number of pilots were shot at from the ground and killed while hanging in their parachutes. Indeed, the ANZACs (soldiers of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) are believed to have shot at all parachutes, some British pilots being wounded or killed in this way. Similarly, on Crete the following month, some German airborne troops were murdered in unknown circumstances, either by civilians or perhaps by ANZACs.

III./JG 77 also operated in the Larissa area on 15 April, the pilots strafing an airfield where they destroyed some Blenheims on the ground. At the same time, *Ofw.* Werner Petermann of 5./JG 77 claimed his 9th *Abschuss*, a British Lysander of 208 Sqn. shot down near Mount Olympus, and another was shot down by an unknown German pilot. Both Lysanders had taken off from Larissa to rescue the survivors from the 211 Sqn. Blenheim shot down by 6./JG 27 two days earlier. I.(*J*)/LG 2, having left the control of JG 27, was now operating under JG 77 and also flew to the Larissa area where *Uffz.* Schneider claimed his second victory which he identified as a Blenheim.[4] During these actions by JG 77 and I.(*J*)/LG 2, *Oblt.* Erich Friedrich of *Stab*/JG 77 was hit by anti-aircraft fire while strafing near Larissa but succeeded in flying his crippled 'Emil' back to his own lines where it was 60% destroyed.

Meanwhile, during the morning, II./JG 27 strafed Kalambaka airfield but near Trikkala, where the remnants of the depleted Greek fighter force had assembled, met Greek fighters for the first time. Three PZL P.24s, two Gladiators and one Hurricane were claimed by 4./JG 27 and the *Staffelkapitän*, *Oblt.* Gustav Rödel, soon to receive the Knight's Cross, claimed two P.24s plus a Hurricane which was in fact a Bloch 151. Two other future *Ritterkreuzträger*, *Ofw.* Otto Schulz and *Lt.* Ernst Börngen, were credited with another P.24 and a Gladiator, and a fourth pilot of 4./JG 27, *Oblt.* Wilhelm Wiesinger, claimed a second Gladiator. The correct number of Greek losses is unknown, but in the heat of the battle there was certainly some overclaiming. Aircraft of II./JG 27 then strafed some landing grounds and claimed two victories but lost a Bf 109 which was severely damaged by anti-aircraft fire and crash-landed at Bitolj.

In Yugoslavia, the High Command was now ready to capitulate and contacted the Germans. British troops in Greece now began an evacuation and *Reichsmarschall* Göring ordered *Luftflotte* 4 to attack British shipping. On the 16th, fighter activity was considerably reduced due to bad weather although II./JG 27 managed to transfer to Ptolemais, while III./JG 27 and JG 77 moved to Korinos.

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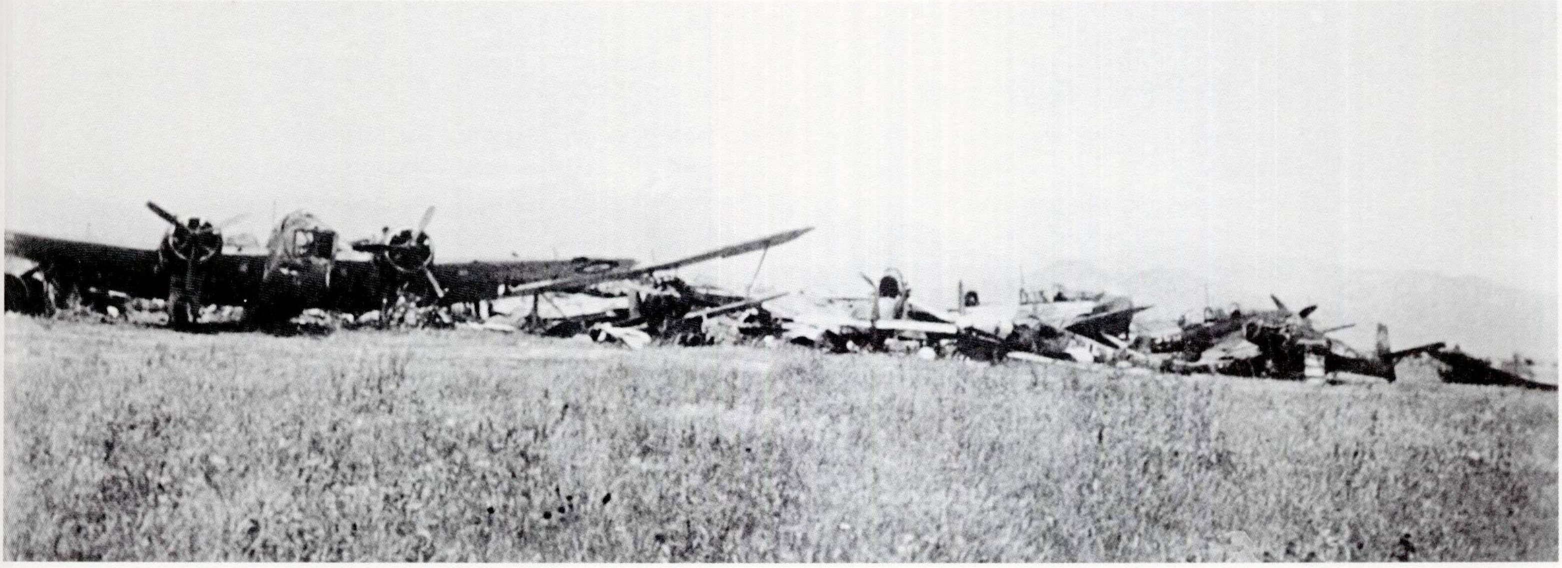
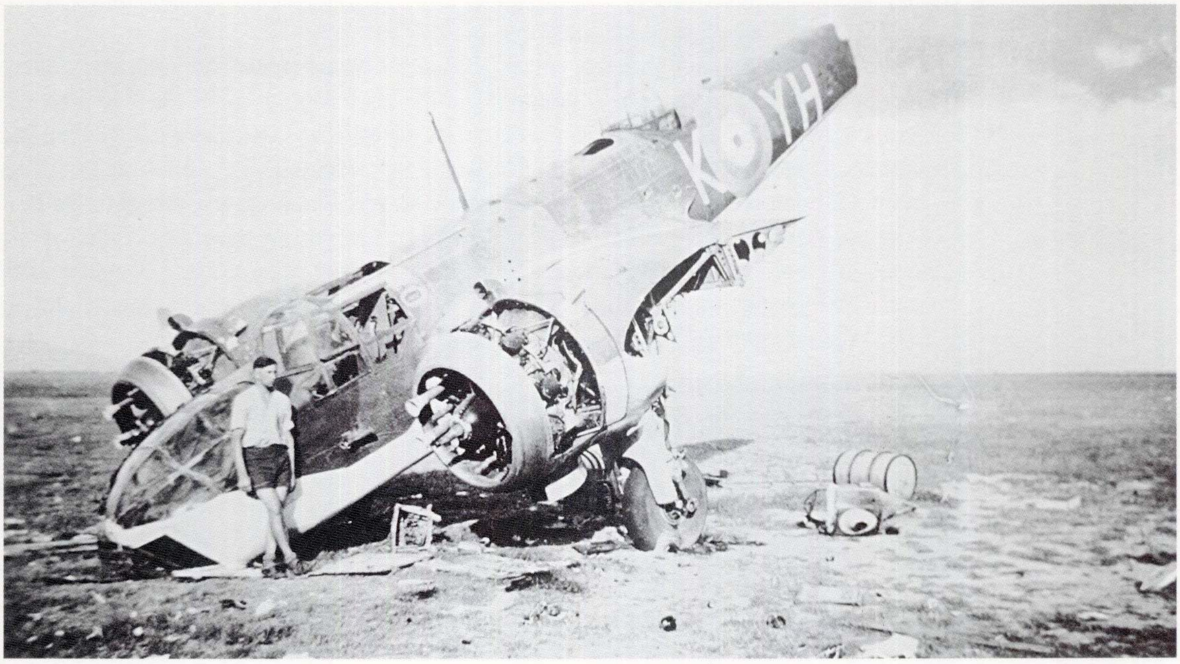
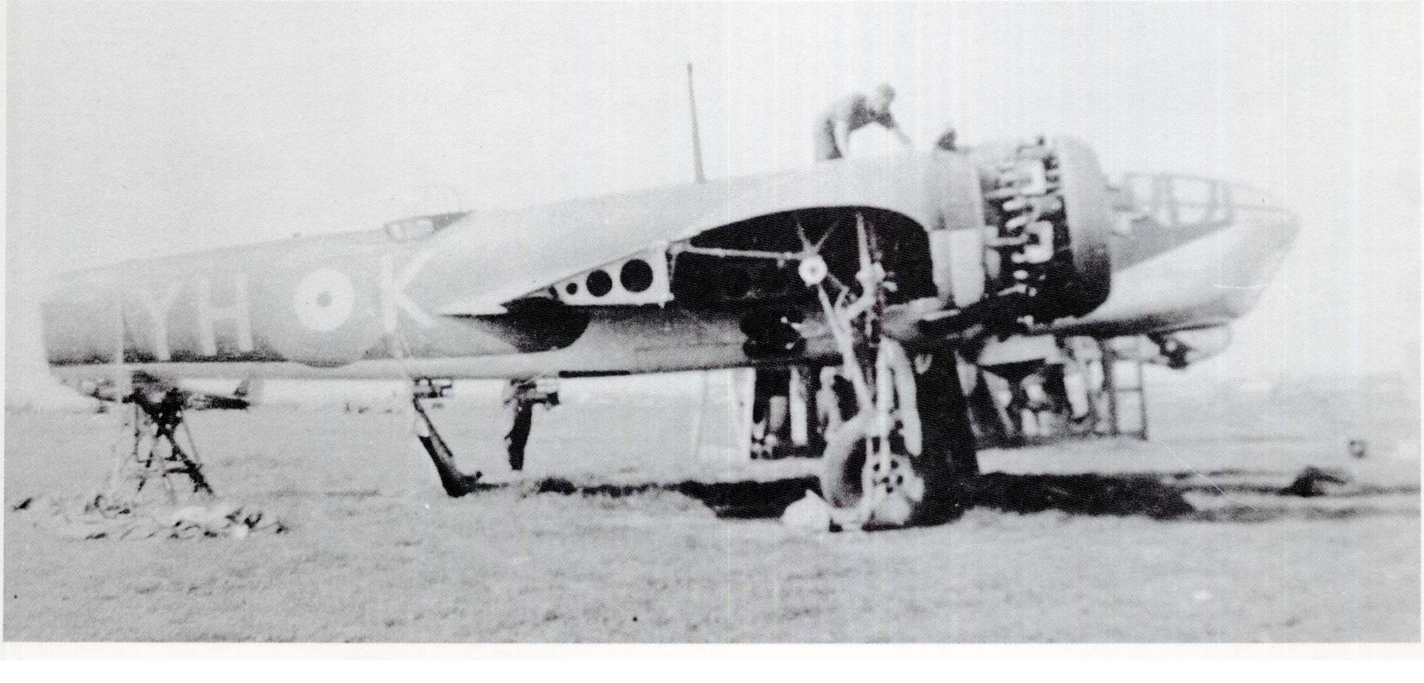
[4] Despite the greatly different appearance, this aircraft may have been a 211 Sqn. Miles Magister which was forced to land but suffered no damage. Later, after the German aircraft had departed, the Magister took off again and proceeded to Larissa.



ABOVE: This view of wrecked aircraft on Larissa airfield includes a Bristol Blenheim, an Hs 123, Bf 109s and Ju 87s.



RIGHT AND BELOW: Although normally based at Luqa, on Malta, this destroyed RAF Blenheim IV bomber of 21 Squadron operated in Greece on detachment and was found by I.(J)/LG 2 at Larissa-Nord in April 1941.



The British Retreat

On 17 April, the Yugoslav Army finally surrendered unconditionally and the King, his family, and members of the government flew to Egypt, taking with them the Yugoslav gold reserve. The *Blitzkrieg* in Yugoslavia had been another success for the *Wehrmacht* which had lost only 151 dead, 392 wounded and 15 missing. At the same time, in Greece, Commonwealth forces were preparing their evacuation and it was now the time for the *Jabo Staffeln* to intervene. Each fighter *Gruppe* already possessed a *Jabo Staffel*, but the most successful and the most aggressive proved to be *Oblt.* Wolfdieter Huy's 7./JG 77 which had already carried out attacks against British shipping off the Greek coast. On the 17th, the *Staffel* attacked a 4,000 ton cargo ship which was struck by a bomb which Huy himself had released, the first of his many successes. Only one of the unit's aircraft was damaged by anti-aircraft fire, but the pilot succeeded in crash-landing on the mainland.

The usual bomber escort and strafing operations continued on 18 April, but the only aerial combat occurred over the Kozani area when 9./JG 77 intercepted a formation of Blenheims from 11 Sqn. which had just bombed German columns. The *Staffelkapitän*, *Oblt.* Armin Schmidt and *Oblt.* Kurt Lasse [5] each claimed one Blenheim, though only one was lost in that area. A Bf 109 of 9./JG 77 was severely damaged while taking off from Korinos, but its pilot was safe. However, at Ptolemais airfield, *Fw.* Franz Jordan of *Stab*/JG 27 was killed when he apparently collided with a Do 17 while landing.

Larissa and Trikkala both fell on 19 April with serious losses on both sides. German forces were now approaching Athens and, although the end was obviously near, the RAF was still active and the fighting grew more aggressive. A formation of Ju 87s was attacked near Lamia by 33 Squadron's Hurricanes before the escort from II./JG 27 could intervene. In a counter-attack, 4./JG 27 claimed two victories though only one Hurricane was damaged, the pilot returning safely to his base. However, one of the two German pilots, *Oblt.* Wilhelm Wiesinger, was forced down and, rather strangely considering the Greeks were not particularly pro-German, was assisted by a local civilian who helped him avoid capture. Wiesinger returned to his unit five days later but was killed by Soviet anti-aircraft fire on the second day of the invasion of Russia.

RIGHT: On 10 April, XL Panzer Korps advanced into Greece through the Monastir Gap and, after being held for a few days, moved forwards to attack Allied defences in the Servia and Olympus Passes. The Germans were harassed as they advanced on these new positions, but on account of their control of the air and the speed of their armour were only temporarily delayed. By 17 April German forces were heading for Thermopylae where the Allies were planning their last major defence line. Here a PzKpfw III advances past a flak position.

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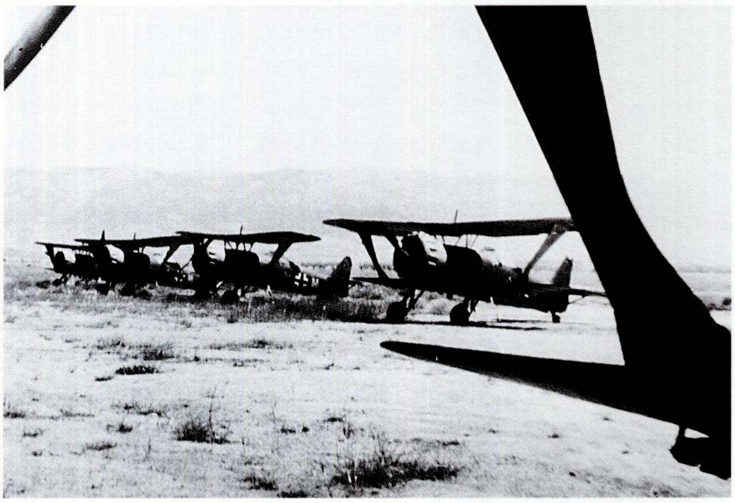
[5] Lasse was killed in October 1941, receiving a posthumous Knight's Cross for his 39 Abschüsse.

While 7./JG 77 maintained pressure on British shipping, the rest of the *Geschwader* was also very active and two pilots from 5./JG 77, *Oblt.* Berthold Jung, the *Stafflekapitän*, and *Oblt.* Gerhard Rahm, each claimed a Greek PZL P.24, initially identified as British Lysanders. This was Rahm's first claim; a year before, he had been a Stuka pilot with II./St.G. 2. One of the *Gruppe's* Bf 109s was damaged by anti-aircraft fire but the pilot returned to Larissa unhurt.

In the morning, III./JG 77 strafed Dadion airfield and claimed two aircraft destroyed on the ground. A few hours later, 8. and 9./JG 77 carried out a *freie Jagd* near Lamia where they again encountered the Hurricanes of 33 Sqn. and a dogfight began. *Oblt.* Kurt Ubben, *Staffelkapitän* of 8./JG 77, *Fw.* Erwin Riehl of 9./JG 77 and *Lt.* Hans Wilhelm 'Hannes' Schopper, the *Gruppe TO*, each submitted claims. Actual British losses were one Hurricane so severely damaged that it could not be repaired and was later abandoned, and another that returned to its base damaged. 'Kuddel' Ubben was shot down in this combat and had to make a forced landing. After destroying his machine, he made for a nearby village, from which he was evacuated by a Fi 156 *Storch* flown by the *Gruppe's* medical officer, *Stabsarzt Dr.* Guerke who, having been a pre-war flying instructor, wished to fly with a front-line unit. The most severe blow, however, was the death near Lamia of *Oblt.* Armin Schmidt, the *Staffelkapitän* of 9./JG 77 and an experienced pilot with three victories who had previously flown with II./Tr.Gr. 186. It is interesting to note that in a wartime article, Ubben mentioned Riehl was his *Kaczmarek*, or wingman, although both pilots belonged to different *Staffeln*. This is further evidence that German fighter units in the Balkans campaign suffered from such a lack of men and machines that with 7./JG 77 operating against shipping, 8. and 9./JG 77 had to combine their meagre forces in order to continue operations over the front in sufficient numbers.



ABOVE: Henschel Hs 123s of 10./LG 2 in Greece. At the end of the fighting in Greece, this Staffel returned to Rumania and was soon again in action in Russia.

At around 11.00 hrs, *Fw.* Reinhold Schmetzer of 8./JG 77 and a comrade set out on a patrol. Meeting a formation of Blenheims over the sea, they claimed five of them, certainly an exaggeration, but three were nevertheless confirmed and credited to Schmetzer. In another combat, *Lt.* Ekke-Eberhard Reinbrecht of 2./LG 2 claimed to have shot down a Hurricane, although no details of the circumstances or the identity of his victim are known. From June 1940, Reinbrecht had flown with I./JG 52 until early 1941 when he transferred to LG 2. Later, he was again frequently transferred, serving with III./JG 26, JG *Nord*, JG 25, JG 106 and JG 1, surviving the war with about six victories.

The Last Aerial Combats on the Mainland

On 20 April, the *Luftwaffe* launched *'Sonderunternehmen Athen'*, virtually a repetition of '*Operation Paula*', the operation against Paris on 5 June 1940. Once again German aircraft operated at long range around a capital city and attacked military targets and airfields in the area, ostensibly to demonstrate Germany's domination of the skies to the local population, although the fact that 20 April was also Hitler's birthday is probably not without significance. As in '*Paula*', the aircrews were not enthusiastic. The Bf 109s could remain over the target for only ten minutes and, as the RAF might still intervene, it was considered dangerous to begin an air battle when so short of fuel. Nevertheless, after a quick breakfast, the fighters took off, but in the event losses were light. II./JG 27 escorted the Ju 88s of LG 1 to Piraeus but near Megara met about 15 Hurricanes from 33 and 80 Squadrons and a major air battle began in which bombers and fighters were lost. 4./JG 27 claimed four Hurricanes, three of them by the *Staffelkapitän*, *Oblt.* Gustav Rödel, and one by *Ofw.* Otto Schulz, while the *Kommodore* of JG 27, *Major* Wolfgang Schellmann, also claimed a Hurricane of 80 Sqn. near Tanagra. True RAF casualties were eight Hurricanes lost and a ninth severely damaged, but 4./JG 27 lost *Ofw.* Fritz Rockel, who was wounded and shot down near Thebes. Rockel made an emergency landing and was lucky to escape from a crowd of angry Greeks before being captured by British troops. Because of his wounds, Rockel was not evacuated to Egypt and was finally freed after the fall of Athens. *Oblt.* Herbert Wasserzier of 7./JG 27, was less fortunate. While strafing Tanagra airfield, his machine was hit by anti-aircraft fire and plunged into the ground. Wasserzier was a veteran of I./JG 1 and had gained a single victory during the Battle of Britain.

JG 77 also experienced some successes and losses when its fighter-bomber *Staffeln*, escorted by III./JG 77, took off to harass enemy shipping. After releasing their bombs, the fighters strafed the airfields at Tatoi, Eleusis and Tanagra, destroying some 18 aircraft, though some of them were obsolete or damaged aircraft which could not be evacuated and had already been abandoned. *Uffz.* Fritz Borchert of 9./JG 77 was shot down over Piraeus but while he seems to have escaped capture, nothing is known of his ultimate fate and it is possible that his wounds prevented him from flying again. II./JG 77 had meanwhile escorted Stukas to Piraeus but returned without incident.

During the following few days the German fighters flew mainly as escorts for bombers attacking the retreating Allied forces, but there were few air battles. Because of the destruction of Piraeus, the British were now using the small harbours of Attica, where the *Jabos* attacked the many ships which were evacuating troops. On 21 April, *2. Panzer Division* captured the important harbour of Volos and *5. Panzer Division* entered Lamia. To improve the aerial actions, three mixed *Gruppen* of fighters and bombers were created and placed under the command of three *Kommodore*: *Major* Bernhard Woldenga of JG 77, *Obstlt.* Oskar Dinort of St.G. 2 and *Major* Wolfgang Schellmann of JG 27. When not escorting their bombers, the fighters strafed any enemy aircraft they found on British-held airfields, II. and III./JG 77 destroying eight machines on Eleusis. In the last air fighting of *'Marita'*, I.(*J*)/LG 2 escorted Bf 110s to Athens and the two *Gruppen* of JG 27 operated over Attica, but there were no more encounters with the enemy.

> ***On 21 April, Oblt. Huy and myself made a dive attack on Allied troop transports off Athens. We then received the order to move to Tanagra where all elements of our Gruppe gathered to be united after a long time. We were pleased to have food again from our field kitchen, for during our moves we had lived only on what the British troops had left during their retreat; corned beef and biscuits, served warm and cold alternatively, plus some jam. This food was unpalatable and was not sufficient to keep us fit. In May, we also suffered considerably from the great heat and, in the days when we sat at readiness in the cockpits of our 'Emils' in temperatures up to 40°C, we felt like dried plums. Our cook, though, did his best to get us back on our feet again.***
>
> *Fw. Johann Pichler, 7./JG 77*

The Last Days of 'Marita'

The Allied evacuation was accelerated on 22 April, but a great deal of intact material had to be left behind as the troops had insufficient time to destroy it. As their advance continued, the German flying units also moved southwards, landing on abandoned airfields previously occupied by the British where they found cigarettes, beer and whisky. When a stock of British military tents was discovered, they proved so superior to the German ones that they remained in use during all their later campaigns in Russia and Africa.

During the last days of fighting in Greece, the fighter pilots assisted in the final victory, destroying eight aircraft on the airfield at Menidi on 22 April, while 7./JG 77 flew daily against the ships evacuating British and Commonwealth troops. Greece capitulated on 23 April but the *Wehrmacht* still had to pursue the retreating Allied forces. That day, in an attack against airfields in the Athens area, II./JG 77 suffered a terrible blow when the aircraft flown by the *Kommandeur*, *Hptm.* Franz-Heinz Lange, received a direct hit from anti-aircraft fire and crashed at Karopion. He was succeeded by *Hptm.* Helmut Henz, who was himself soon to disappear.

III./JG 77 claimed the last victory of *'Marita'* when *Ofw.* Herbert Höhne intercepted an unlucky Lysander of 208 Squadron near Argos which he identified as a PZL P.24. The army co-operation aircraft, which was flying very low over trees, was unable to escape and crashed in flames. Fortunately, the crew was rescued by British soldiers and survived. About six months later, for family reasons, Höhne changed his name and, as Herbert Kaiser, later received the *Ritterkreuz*, served with JG 1 and the famous jet unit JV 44 and survived the war.

On 24 April, JG 77 experienced two further losses during an operation over Athens. *Lt.* Siegfried Freytag of 6./JG 77 fell victim to an anti-aircraft shell but made a successful emergency landing and was captured lightly wounded. Taken to a British hospital, Freytag was laying on his bed when he saw two Greek officers enter the ward. Ignoring the fact that Greece had already capitulated, they explained to the British medical personnel that as it was a Greek anti-aircraft gun which had brought him down, the pilot was technically their prisoner and demanded that he be transferred to a Greek hospital. Thus Freytag was able to avoid being sent to Egypt with other PoWs and, two days later, watched from his

RIGHT: A Luftwaffe officer inspecting an abandoned British Matilda tank.

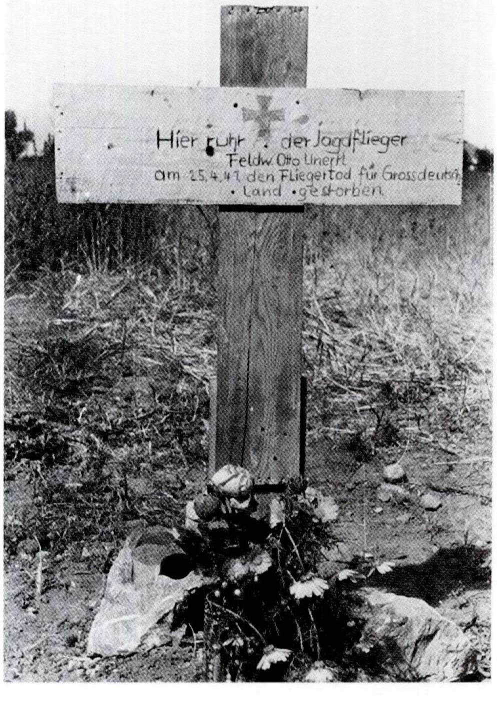
hospital balcony as victorious German troops entered the Greek capital. Awarded the *Ritterkreuz*, Freytag later became *Kommandeur* of II./JG 77 but, although he survived the war, he never realised his dream of being promoted and becoming *Kommodore* of a *Geschwader*.

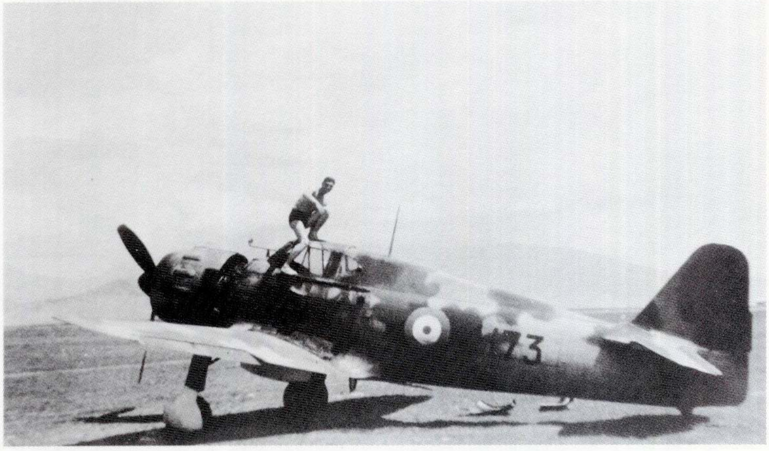
Fw. Otto Unertl of 9./JG 77 was not so fortunate. Also falling victim to anti-aircraft fire, he was killed on 25 April near Nauplion. His comrade Emil Omert later searched for Unertl's body and was eventually able to locate it and place a cross on the grave.

The same day, *Hptm.* Wolfgang Lippert, *Kommandeur* of II./JG 27, ordered *Lt.* Ernst Börngen, another future *Ritterkreuzträger*, and *Fw.* Herbert Trautmann to reconnoitre Eleusis airfield which was to be the *Gruppe's* next base. In order to hinder any landings and obstruct the airfield, retreating Allied troops had littered it with all manner of vehicles. Despite this, the two men were able to land their Ju W34 without incident and, discovering a tractor, set about clearing the obstacles. Having completed this task they then decided they would like to visit Athens. That evening, the two pilots motor-cycled to the Greek capital where, despite their eagle and swastika emblems, no one noticed that they were German airmen and, because of the similar uniform, thought that they were Greek postmen. For the return trip to Eleusis, Börngen and Trautmann liberated an RAF staff car but were stopped by troops of the *2. Panzer Division* advancing on Athens who were very surprised to find that the two miscreants had already been the first Germans to enter the city.

BELOW: A column of Commonwealth motor-transport deliberately destroyed during the Allied withdrawal in Greece to prevent the vehicles from falling into German hands.

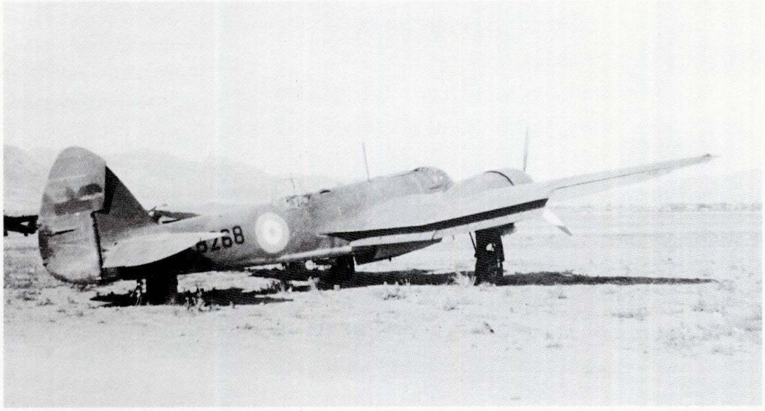
BELOW: On 25 April 1941, Fw. Otto Unertl of 9./JG 77 was shot down by anti-aircraft fire over Nauplion and was still in the aircraft when it crashed into the ground. The British buried his body close to the remains of his aircraft and marked the grave 'An unknown German pilot'. At the end of 'Marita', Emil Omert set about locating the grave of his comrade. Having found it, he erected a wooden cross properly marked with Fw. Unertl's full name and rank and bearing the inscription, 'He met a flier's death on 25.4.41 and died for Greater Germany'.

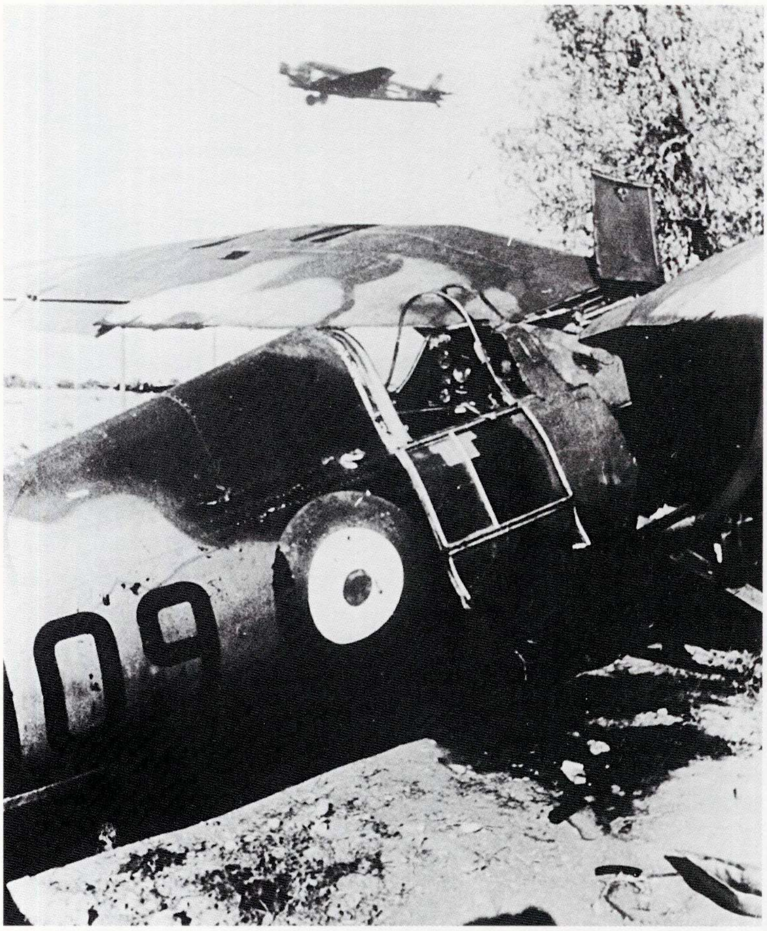

Hier ruht der Jagdflieger
Feldw. Otto Unertl
am 25.4.41 den Fliegertod für Grossdeutsch
Land gestorben.



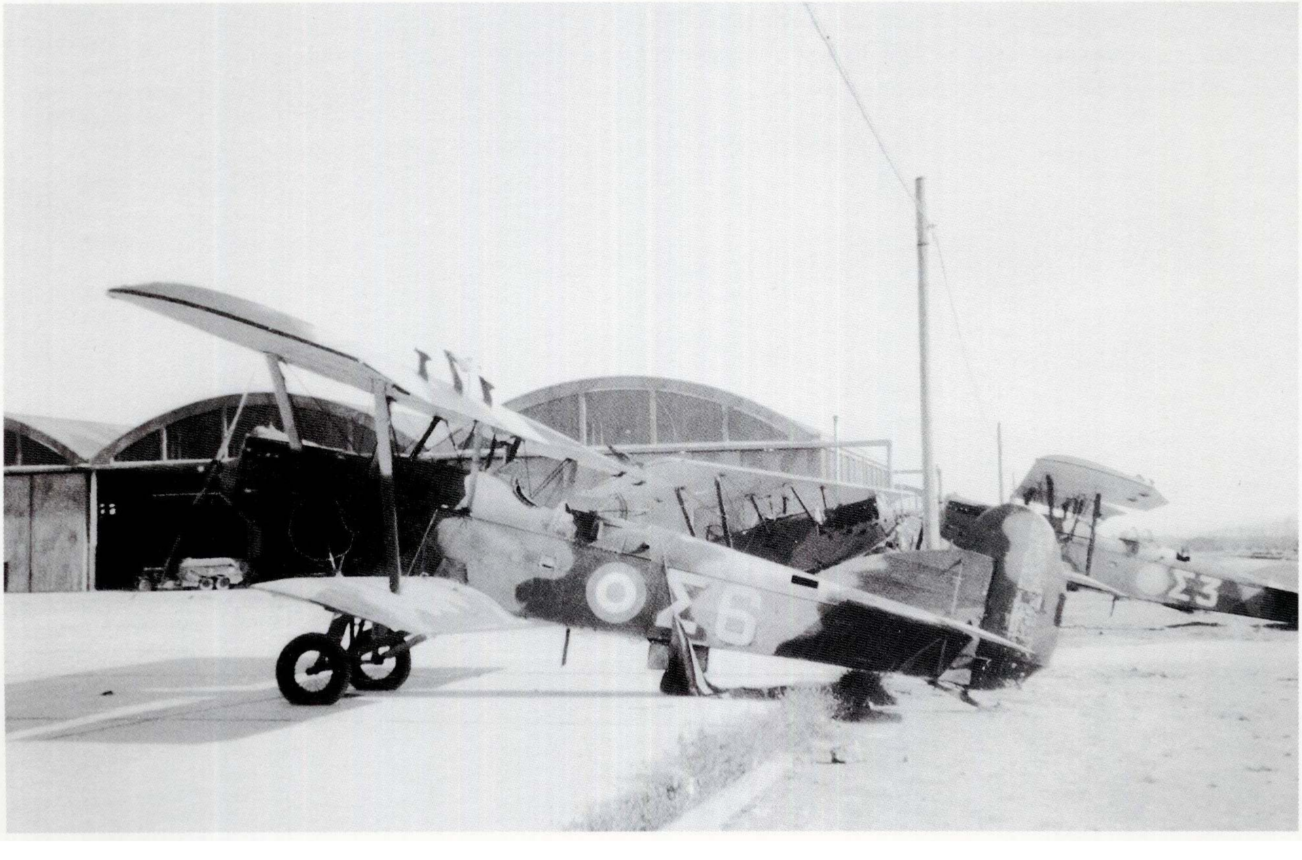
ABOVE: A captured Bloch 151 fighter of the Royal Hellenic Air Force. Nine aircraft of this type are believed to have been delivered to Greece.

BELOW: A Bristol Blenheim in Greek markings which fell intact into German hands.A total of 18 Blenheims were delivered to 32 Bomber Squadron of the Royal Hellenic Air Force.The squadron's most successful air operations were against the Italians.



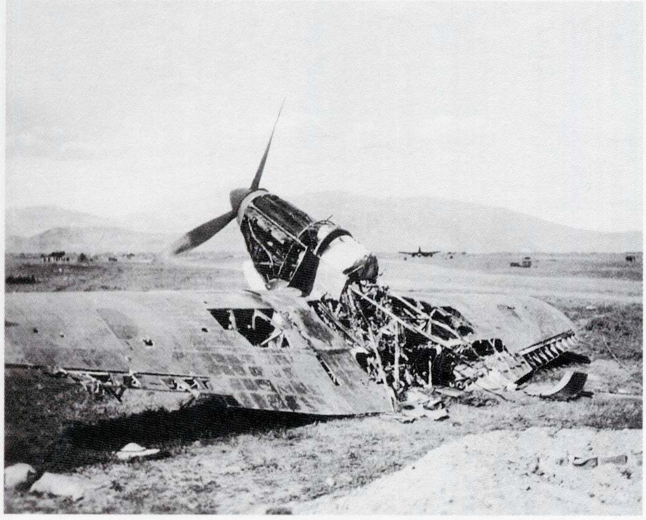


ABOVE: A captured PZL P.24.This Polish-built aircraft was one of the main fighters of the Royal Hellenic Air Force.

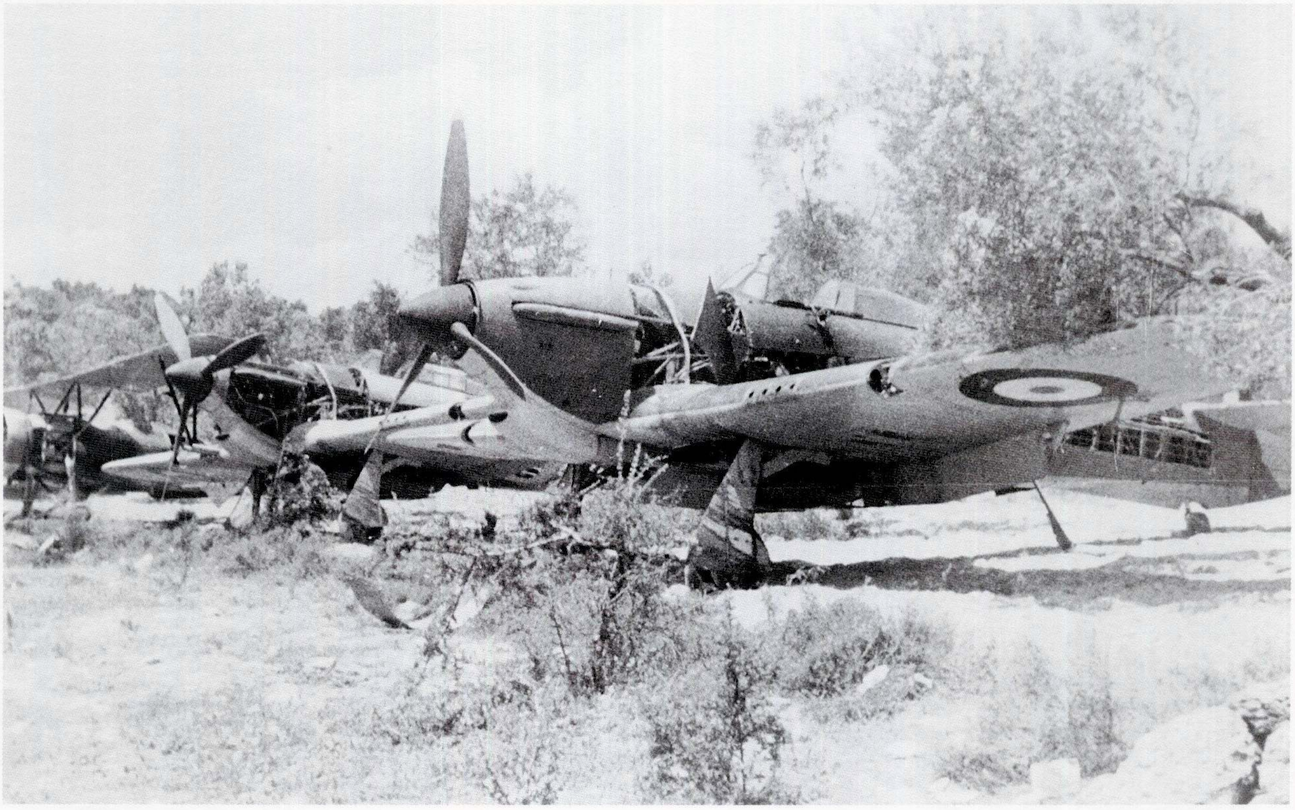


LEFT: Captured Greek Potez 25 A2 two-seat army co-operation aircraft, photographed at Athens-Tatoi airport in May 1941.The Royal Hellenic Air Force took delivery of 30 of these aircraft, all with Hispano-Suiza 12 Jb engines, but a total of some 3,500 werebuilt and served with twenty different air forces. Other engines installed included Lorraine-Dietrich, Renault, and Gnôme-Rhône types.

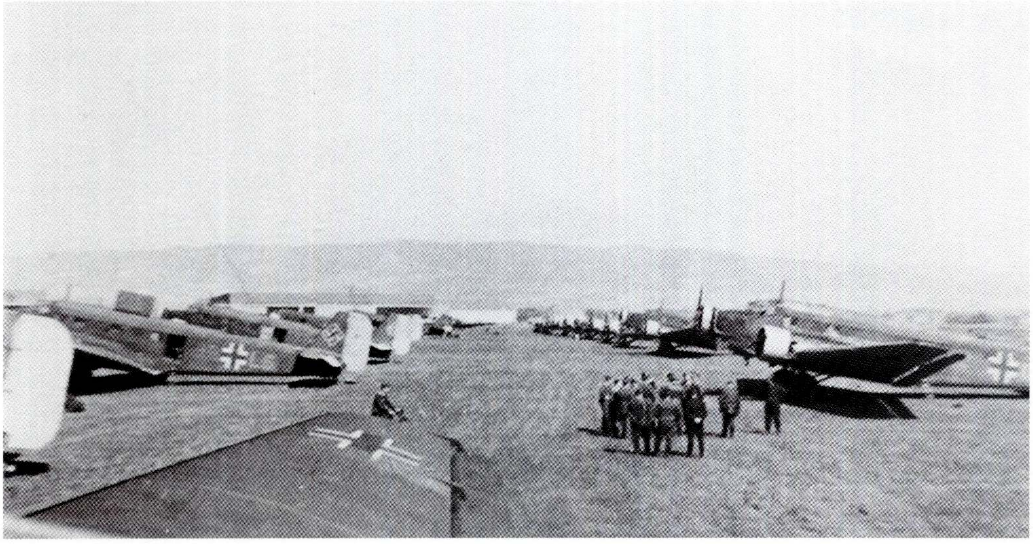
LEFT AND BELOW: The passengers aboard these aircraft at Larissa comprised the delegation of Italian officers which signed the instrument of Greece's surrender on 23 April 1941.

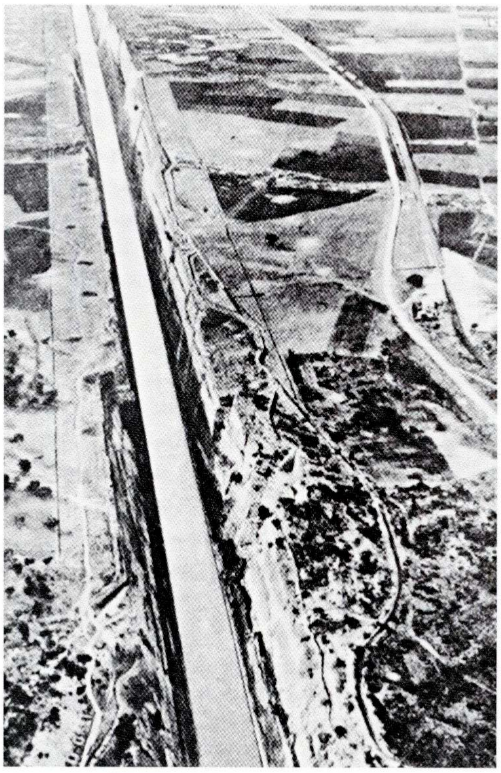


LEFT: A burned-out Hurricane found at Larissa-Nord by I.(J)/LG 2. At the start of the Greek campaign, 33, 80 and 112 Squadrons, which had been sent to support the British Expeditionary Force, were equipped with Gladiators. They were later replaced by Hurricanes but for a while the few remaining Gladiators were retained and operated together with the Hurricanes. In Greece, the RAF found the nimble Italian CR.42s, an example of which may be seen on the far left of the photograph (*BELOW*) taken on Argos airfield after the British retreat. The CR.42 was much more manoeuvrable than the Hurricanes and it was reported that Hurricanes and Gladiators collaborated to deal with them. In theory, the Hurricanes attacked first with the object of winging the CR.42 which was then given the coup de grâce by the Gladiators diving from above. It was also found that the 12.7 mm armament of the CR.42 proved disturbing to the rear gunners in Blenheims, the Italian biplane being able to fire at the Blenheims while remaining out of range of the bombers' Vickers or Browning defensive armament.



BELOW: On 26 April 1941, XI. Fliegerkorps launched a parachute and airborne attack by the whole of the specially reinforced Fallschirmjäger Regiment 2 on the bridge spanning the canal at Corinth and the outskirts of the town. The parachute troops were flown into action by four Ju 52/3m Gruppen, I./KGzbV 1, KGzbV 60, KGvbV 102 and I./LLG 1, while some ten DFS 230 gliders landed more parachute troops close to the bridge spanning the isthmus. These Ju 52/3ms were photographed shortly before they took off from Larissa.





ABOVE: An aerial view of the Corinth Canal.

ABOVE AND ABOVE RIGHT: In addition to paratroops, the attack on the Corinth Canal involved a glider assault led by Lt. Wilhelm Fulda, for which he received the Knight's Cross. In these later photographs, taken in early 1944, Fulda is seen visiting a Staffel of Luftlandegeschwader 2, then based near Aschaffenburg in Germany. Note that the tail of the DFS glider in the background (*ABOVE RIGHT*) has an interesting triangle marking, as also seen on some Ju 52/3ms. Fulda had an notable and varied career, also serving with JG 301 and JG 302 and at the end of the war was Kommandeur of the Me163 Gruppe I./JG 400.

RIGHT: Recognisable by the Edelweiss badge on their right sleeve, Gebirgsjäger, or mountain troops, raise the German flag over the Acropolis, the citadel of ancient Athens. After the glider and main parachute assault on Crete, troops from the 5th Mountain Division and a Mountain Assault Battalion of the 6th Mountain Division were air-landed on the island.

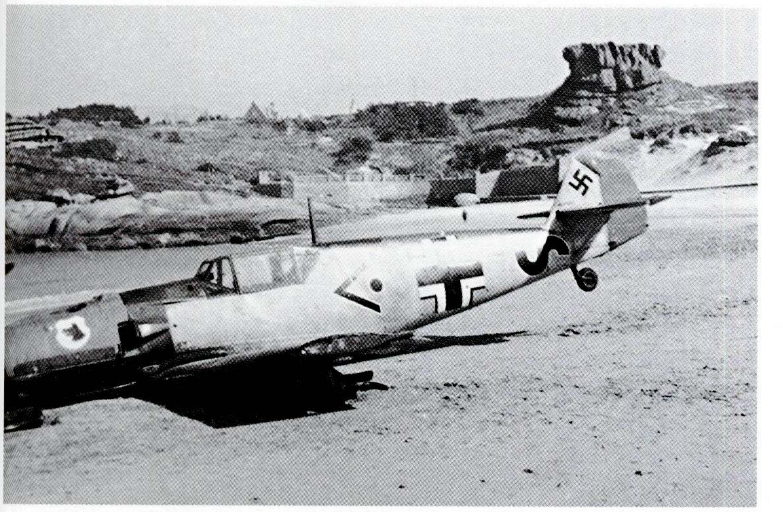
On 26 April, JG 27 escorted a fleet of Ju 52/3ms which took off to drop paratroops whose task was to seize an important bridge over the Corinth Canal which separated the Peloponnese from mainland Greece. The bridge was demolished before it could be captured but on the 27th, German troops entered Athens and practically brought the mainland part of the Balkans campaign to an end. For the next two days, German fighters patrolled or flew as escort for the bombers and fighter-bombers which attacked the last ships leaving Greece.

LEFT: Lt. Emil Omert of 8./JG 77 visiting the Acropolis in Athens. Although he achieved one victory in Yugoslavia and two over Crete, he particularly distinguished himself in the Balkans campaign, and later in Russia, with his numerous, low-level Jabo missions. He was later awarded the Ritterkreuz and became Kommandeur of III./JG 77, but was killed in action over Rumania on 24 April 1944. On that occasion III. Gruppe had taken off to intercept a raid of about 500 B-17s and B-24s but Omert had to bale out and was killed while still in his parachute by a P-51 Mustang. Whether this was intentional or an accident could not be established, but his death was a huge blow to III./JG 77. His final total of victories was 70.

Between 'Marita' and 'Merkur'

Even before the end of the Greek Campaign, many *Jagdgeschwader* had already begun to leave the Balkans. As already mentioned, I./JG 27 was recalled to the *Reich* very early before being ordered to Africa, and JG 54 had been withdrawn with the fall of Yugoslavia. Abandoning their Bf 109 Es in Rumania, the pilots of JG 54 boarded transport aircraft and moved northwards where they were to retrain on newer versions of the Bf 109. For example, II./JG 54 moved to Stolp where it took delivery of the Bf 109 F, soon known as the 'Friedrich'. In early May, III./JG 27 transferred from Eleusis airfield to Sicily where it was based for a few weeks and, together with 7./JG 26, operated over Malta before joining the new Eastern Front. Thereafter, the only *Jagdgruppen* remaining in Greece were *Stab*, II. and III./JG 77, I.(*Jagd*)/LG 2 and II./JG 27.

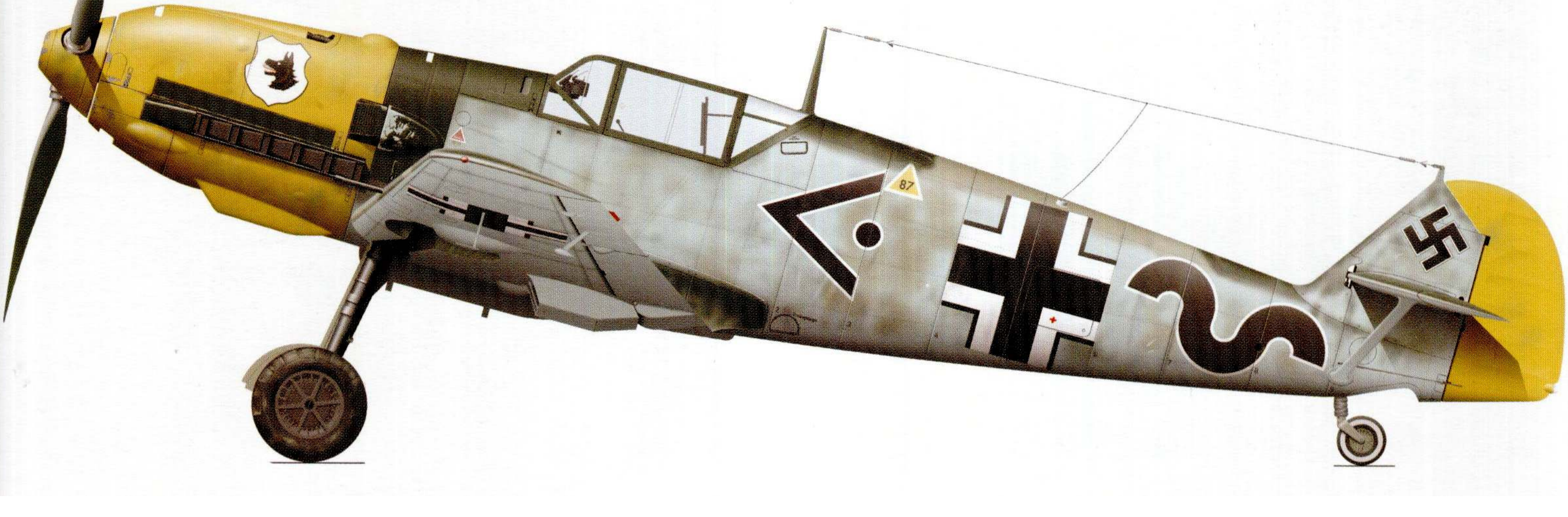
The members of these units now had time to see some of the archaeological treasures of Greece. Naturally, Athens and such famous historical monuments as the Acropolis were the most popular sights, but the pilots showed more interest in the large stocks of war booty discovered on the airfields on which they were based. The whisky and tins of British Players cigarettes were naturally most welcome and the braver individuals tried flying some of the captured aircraft which littered the airfields. This,

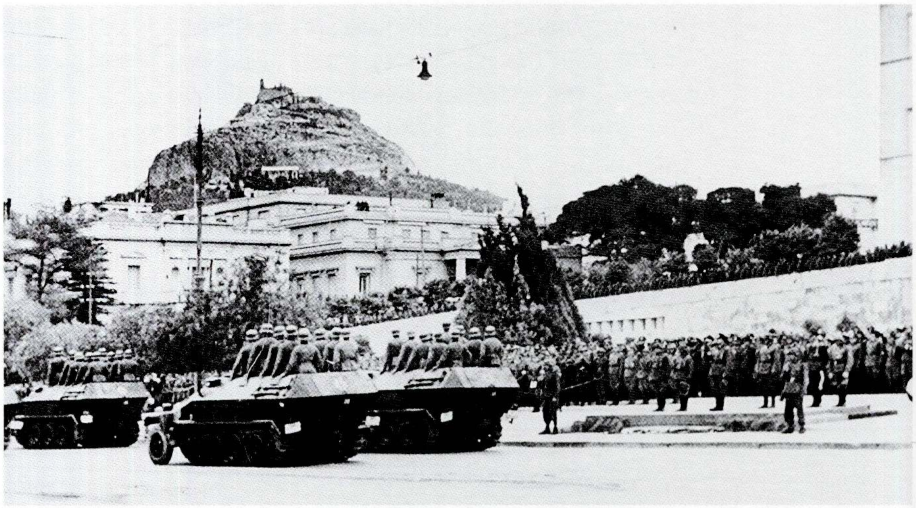


LEFT: Apparently damaged between 'Marita' and 'Merkur', this Bf 109 E of Stab III./JG 77 made a wheels-up landing on the Greek coast.

Messerschmitt Bf 109 E of the Gruppenstab, III./JG 77

The standard early type 71/02/65 high demarcation scheme on this aircraft has been modified only with the addition of a very light 02 mottle over the fuselage sides. A replacement green cowling has been fitted ahead of the windscreen and another, which allowed access to the spark plugs, has been fitted over the exhausts. Although these panels appear lighter in the photograph, comparison with the black of the fuselage cross will show that this is an effect of the sunlight. Note that the Gruppe symbol aft of the fuselage cross has not been positioned on the fuselage centreline.





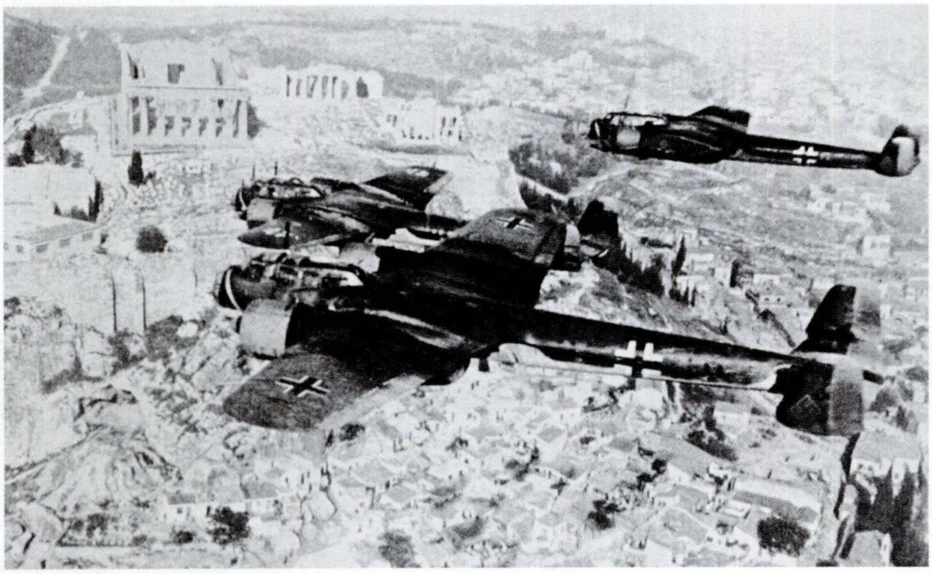
ABOVE AND BELOW: Scenes during the Wehrmacht victory parade in and over Athens on 3 May 1941 showing (*ABOVE*) SdKfz 251 half-tracked troop carriers with Mount Lycabethus in the background and (*BELOW*) Do 17s of KG 2 over the city. Although JG 77 took part in the fly-past, operational wear and tear and an acute shortage of spares during the Balkans campaign had seriously affected serviceability and only a few aircraft could participate.

however, was a risky business and on 1 May, *Ogfr.* Günter Gastmann of 2./LG 2 was killed at Larissa while making a test or ferry flight in a captured aircraft. On 3 May, a great victory parade and flypast was held in Athens, but due to the wear and tear of the recent fighting, the *Jagdgruppen* could participate with only a handful of aircraft. As an example, III./JG 77 only just managed to get nine aircraft into the air, fewer than the normal establishment of a *Staffel*.

In addition to the fighter units, the *Luftwaffe's* ground-attack unit II.(*Schlacht*)/LG 2 was also in action in the Balkans. The flying units of this *Gruppe* had earlier flown to Bulgaria from their earlier bases on the Channel coast in France, and mounted their first sorties against the Metaxas Line on 6 April. After assisting in the destruction of the Yugoslav Air Force and flying in support of the ground troops' advance to Skopje, Prilep and Thessaloniki in Greece, the *Gruppe* began transferring to airfields in Greece on 10 April and from the 14th flew against Allied defences in the Servia and Olympus Passes. The *Gruppe* was then in action continuously, supporting the Army's push into the Peloponnese and the airborne operation at Corinth. In addition to attacks on land targets, the unit also flew a considerable number of sorties against Allied shipping evacuating troops from Corinth and the Aegean ports of Volos, Khalkis and Piraeus. Shipping which succeeded in reaching Suda Bay on Crete was also attacked, one particularly successful pilot being the future *Ritterkreuzträger*, *Uffz.* Willi Tritsch of 5. *Staffel* who, on the morning of 27 April, scored a direct hit with a bomb on a 2,000 ton ship which sank two hours later. In the afternoon of the same day, Tritsch took off again and carried out a particularly successful low-level attack with bombs and cannon against a convoy of enemy vehicles near Sparta, in the Peloponnese. On another occasion, armed with four bombs under his Bf 109, Tritsch attacked two ships near Suda Bay and sank both, returning safely despite his aircraft being hit by flak.

On 28 April, German forces captured Kalamata in the Peloponnese, the last embarkation port available to the Allies, and on the 30th, II.(*Schlacht*)/LG 2 was ordered to return to Döberitz in Germany, where the *Gruppe* was to be re-equipped in preparation for the forthcoming invasion of Russia. However, because of the severe shortage of operational aircraft remaining in the area, the *Gruppe* was ordered to leave its aircraft behind so that they could be used by III./JG 77 in operations against Crete. The long journey northwards was therefore made by rail and it was not until 5 May that the last elements of II.(*Schlacht*)/LG 2 are believed to have finally left the Balkans.

When II.(*Schlacht*)/LG 2 was first ordered to Bulgaria, its signals and communications troops were instructed to follow on by road and rail. However, so rapid was the advance of the *Schlachtgruppe* during the fighting in Yugoslavia and Greece, and so frequent were its moves from base to base, that the signals unit was constantly left behind and after leaving France and traipsing round the Balkans, only succeeded in being reunited with the flying section after it had returned to Döberitz.



'Marita' Losses

The available *Luftwaffe* records for this period show some discrepancies and even the Quartermaster General's loss lists, considered reliable by many researchers, contain some anomalies. According to the personnel loss lists, the *Stab*, II. and III./JG 77 lost five pilots killed and one wounded in action during *'Marita'*, figures which appear correct as the names of the pilots can be confirmed by other sources. Material losses for the seven fighter *Staffeln* suggest a total of 14 aircraft completely destroyed and 12 more than 50% damaged.[6] However, if these figures are reliable, then at the end of the Balkan campaign the *Geschwaderstab* and two *Gruppen* of JG 77 should still have possessed about 50 serviceable aircraft, but the recollections of the pilots indicate that this cannot be correct. As already mentioned, 8. and 9./JG 77 had to fly together over Greece in order to carry out their assigned patrols and escort missions and some personnel from JG 77 have confirmed that the strength of each *Gruppe* had been reduced to just six or nine machines.

Former *Oberleutnant* 'Hannes' Schopper, the Technical Officer of III./JG 77, recalled that a few days after the end of *'Marita'*, he was designated by the *Kommandeur*, von Winterfeldt, to travel with eleven comrades in a Ju 52/3m to Bucharest-Baneasa in Rumania. This airfield was the repair centre for all Bf 109s in the area [7] and Schopper was to ferry 12 replacement 'Emils' - presumably the aircraft left behind by JG 54 - to Greece. While flying south, the formation encountered bad weather, but with some skill Schopper was able to avoid the cold front and all 12 aircraft landed safely in Southern Greece. However, the pilots of II. *Gruppe*, who were at the same time engaged in a similar mission, were less fortunate and on their return flight had to crash-land all 12 of their fighters near Salonika. The point of this account is that none of these losses appear in the *Luftwaffe* Quartermaster's lists.

To increase their strength, the fighter units were forced to recover as many as possible of the Bf 109 E fighter-bombers which II.(*Schlacht*)/LG 2 had left behind. This great need for replacement machines indicates that, in the harsh conditions in the Balkans, many aircraft became unserviceable due to normal wear and tear far more rapidly than in more temperate environments. Many 'Emils' were also written off in the workshops due to a simple lack of spares or were cannibalised to keep other aircraft flying. As these machines had not been put out of action in combat, they were not therefore mentioned in the official loss lists, a fact which explains the depleted condition of each *Gruppe* when, officially, they had lost only one third of their number.

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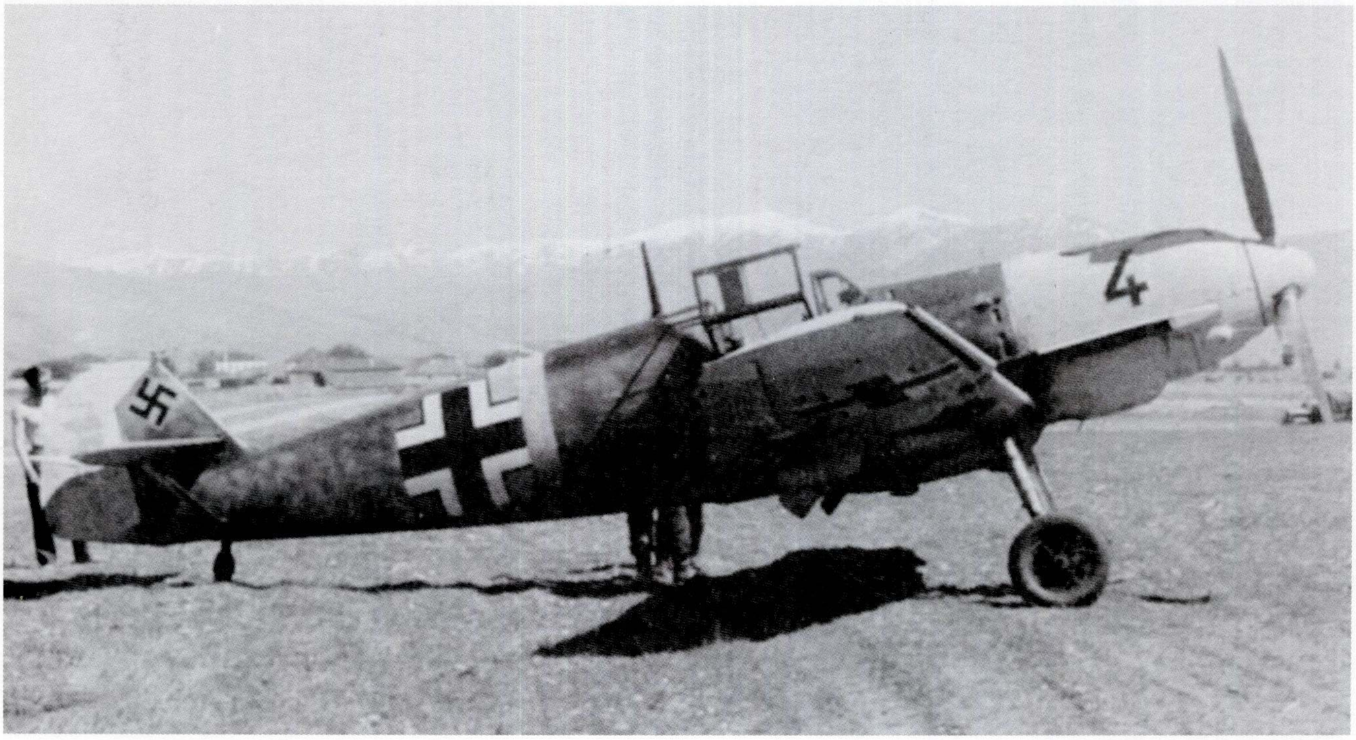
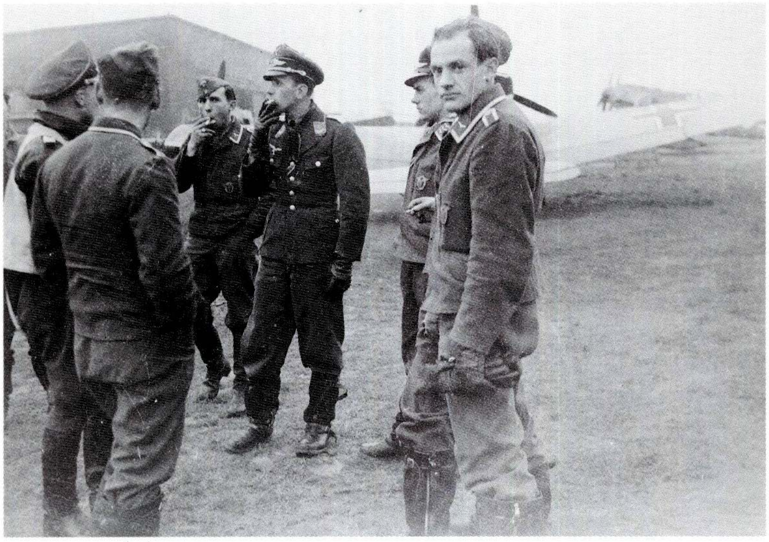
[6] Aircraft 60% damaged were considered written off.

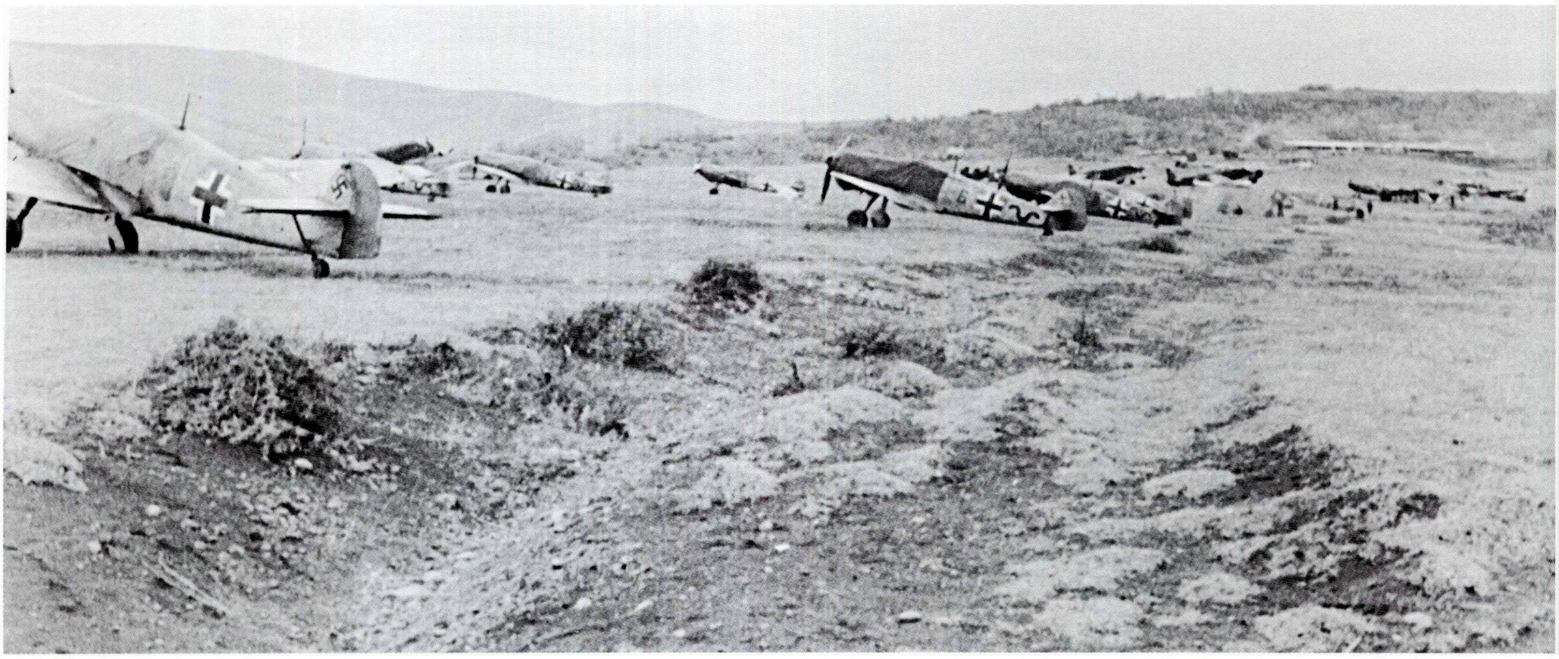
[7] I./JG 28 had been based there a year earlier and its workshops used to overhaul German and Rumanian Bf 109s. The airfield would also soon become the repair centre for the future Eastern Front.



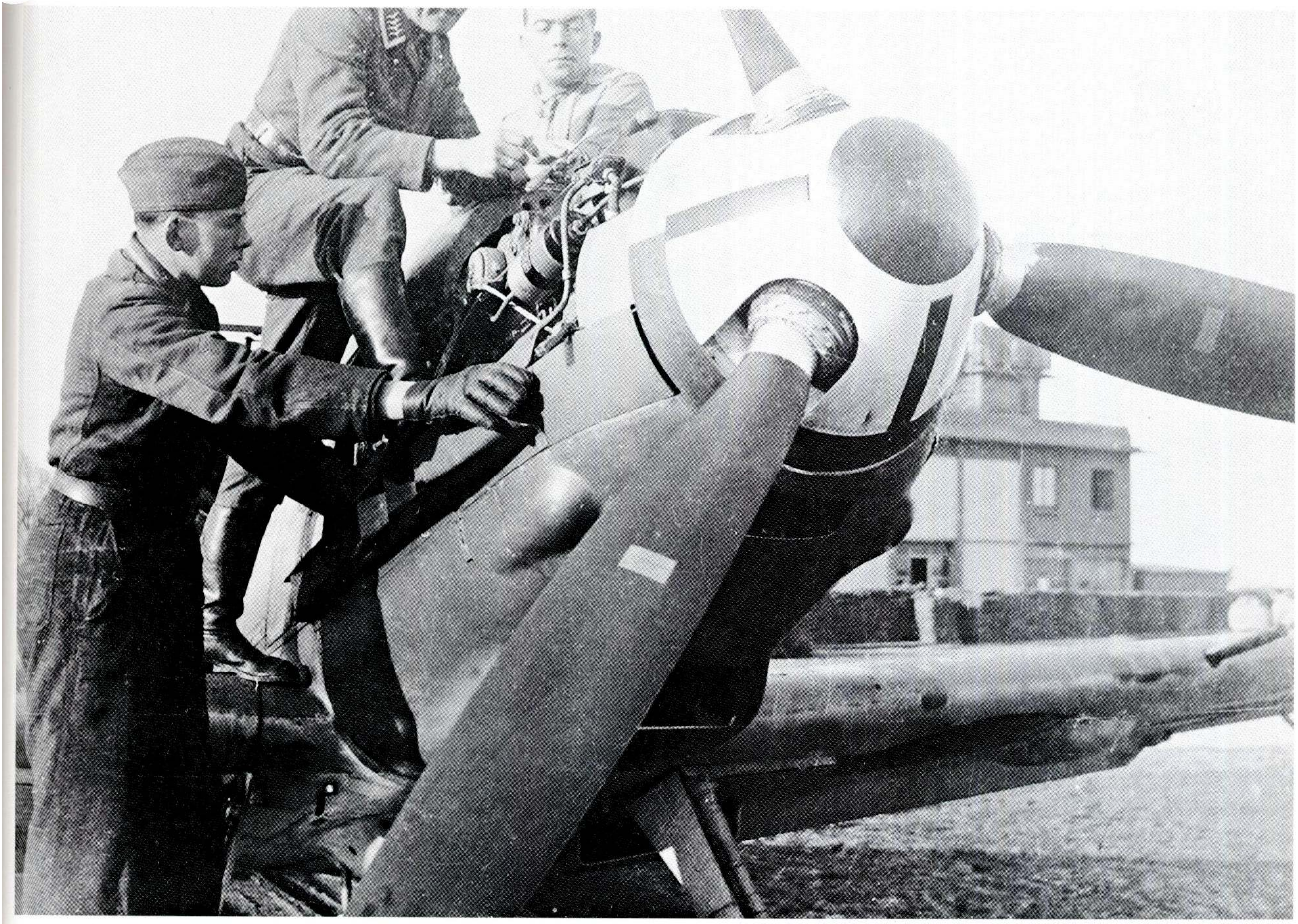
RIGHT: The instruction regarding the application of the yellow fuselage bands which were applied to most aircraft during the Balkans campaign seems to have been fairly liberally interpreted, resulting in a number of variations in band width and location. On this Bf 109 E-7, 'Black 4' of III./JG 27, the band has been applied in such a way that it borders the forward edge of the fuselage Balkenkreuz.



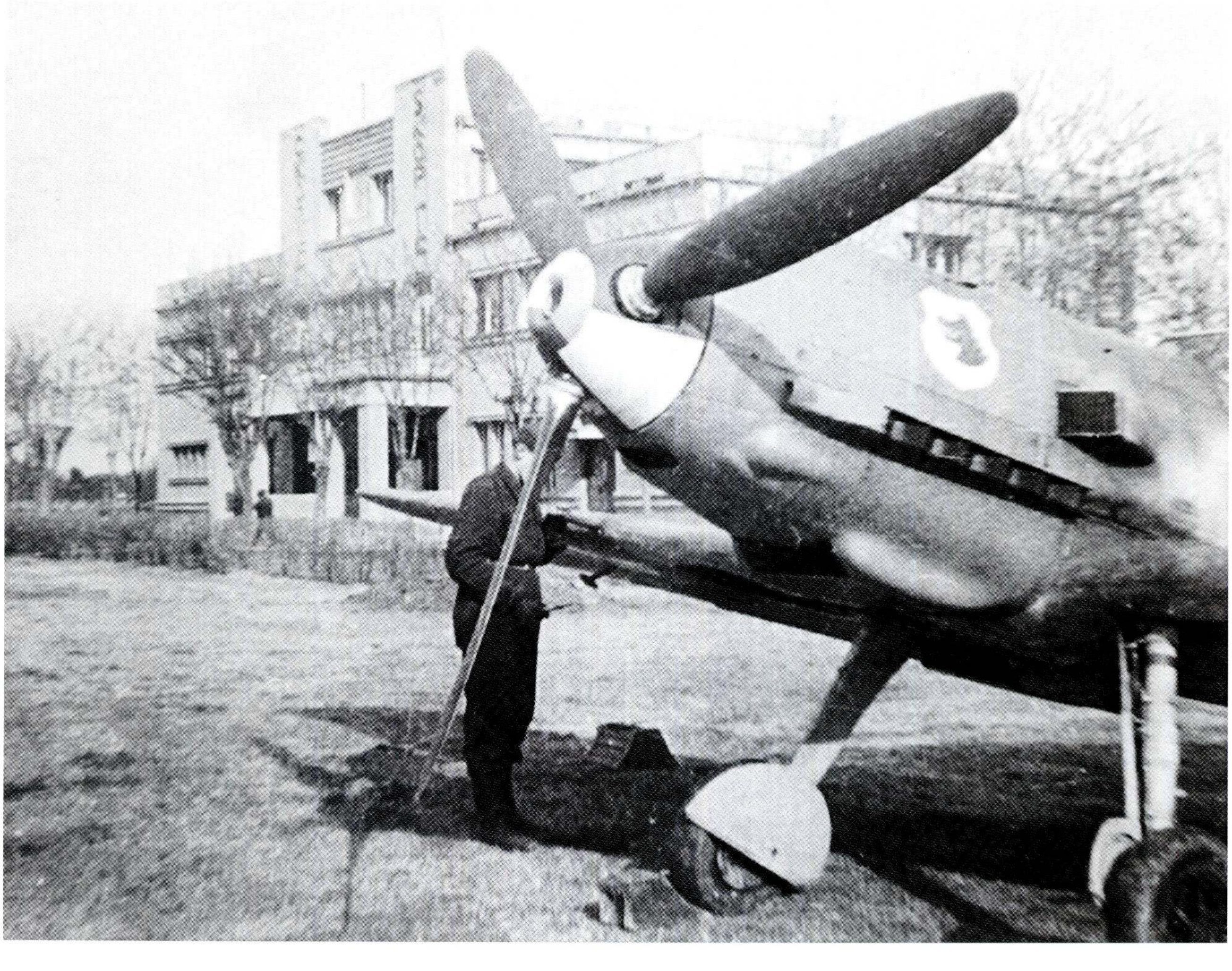
LEFT: Pilots of 7./JG 77 in early 1941. The officer standing in the centre is Oblt. Heveler and the Unteroffizier on the far right looking towards the camera is Eduard Isken, who flew with III./JG 77 until October 1944. He then transferred to JG 53 and flew in the Mediterranean theatre and in defence of the Reich. Isken was awarded the Ritterkreuz on 14 January 1945 when an Oberfeldwebel and ended the war with 56 victories.



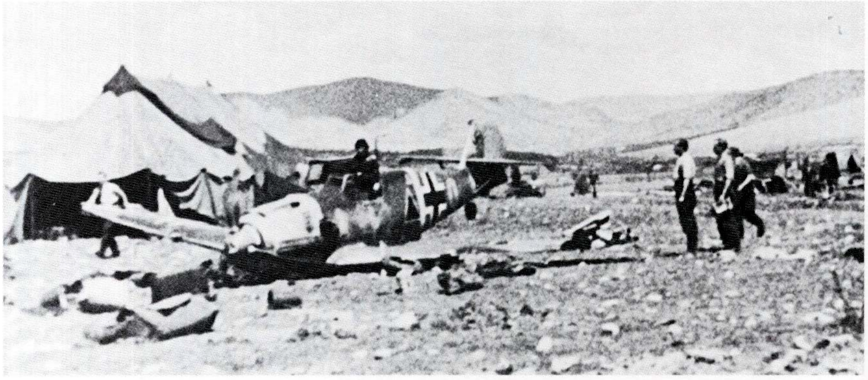
ABOVE AND RIGHT: Pilots and aircraft of III./JG 77 on Vrba airfield early in the morning of 8 or 9 April 1941.

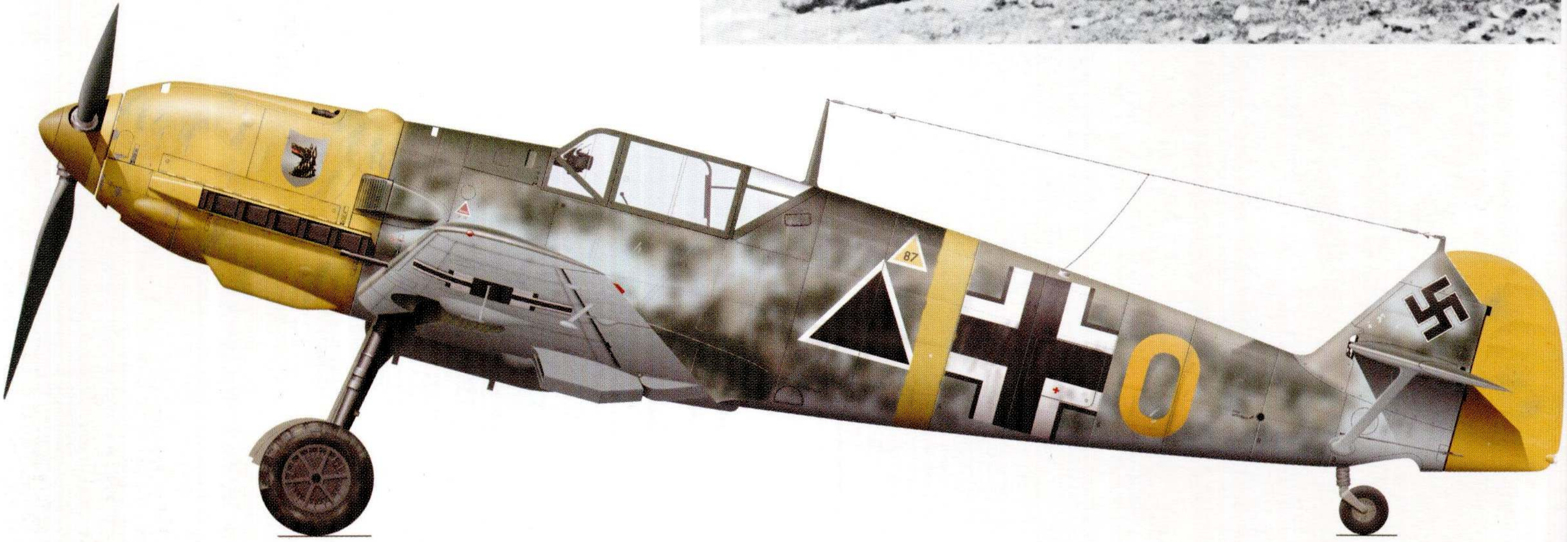


ABOVE AND RIGHT: Yellow cowlings and elaborate spinner designs on aircraft of III./JG 77 photographed at Üsküp (Skopje). The spinner (*RIGHT*) seems to be quartered in white and green with a three-quarter yellow segment to the nose ring. The design on the capped spinner (*ABOVE*) is even more elaborate and would appear to be in red and white with a backplate halved in green and white. Note that due to the type of film used, the yellow cowling appears darker than normal.

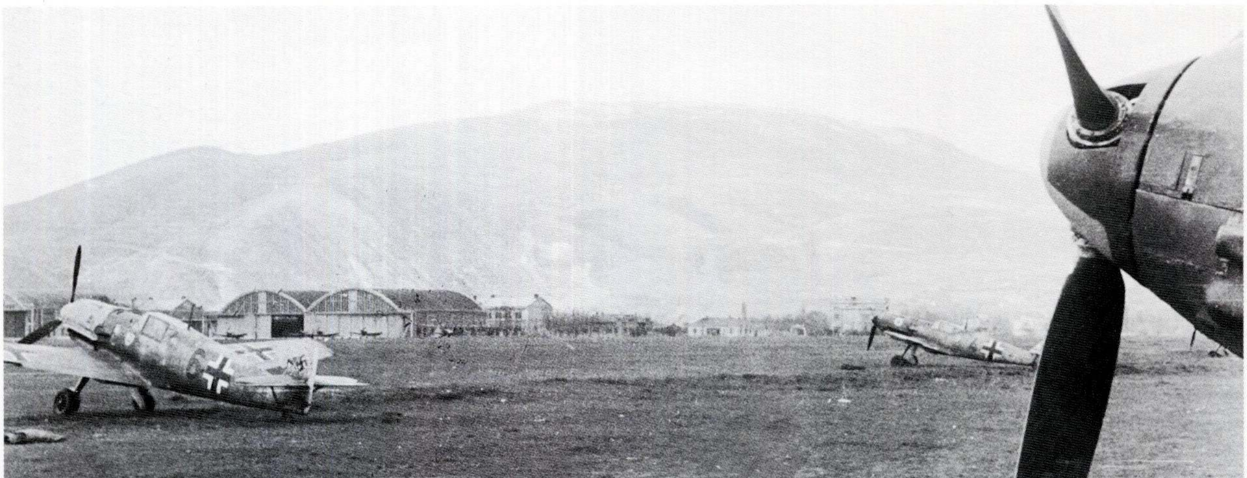


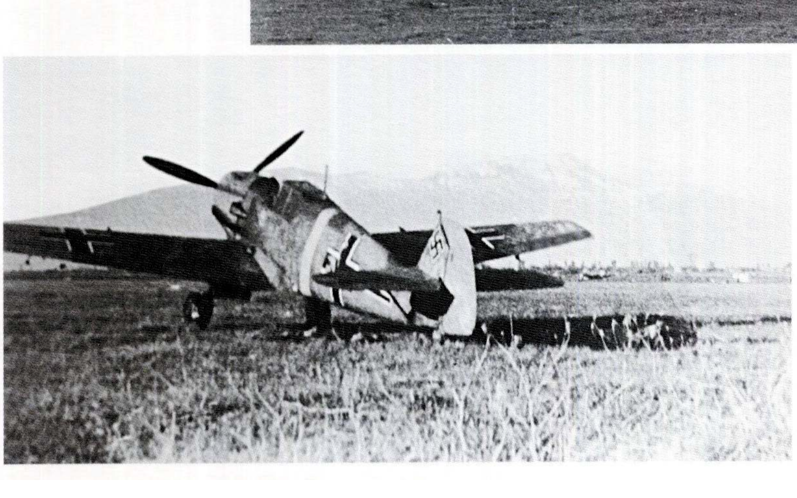
RIGHT: The Luftwaffe's only dedicated ground-attack unit, II.(Schlacht)/LG 2, was very active during the campaigns in Yugoslavia and Greece, and when the Gruppe was recalled to prepare for action in Russia, it left behind some of its aircraft which were then taken over by III./JG 77. This machine is presumed to have crashed as a result of combat damage, and although the markings are those of II.(Schlacht)/LG 2, the machine may not have been operated by that unit when this photograph was taken since the badge on the nose, probably painted over the original badge of 5.(Schlacht)/LG 2, is believed to have been a variation of the wolf's head used by III./JG 77.



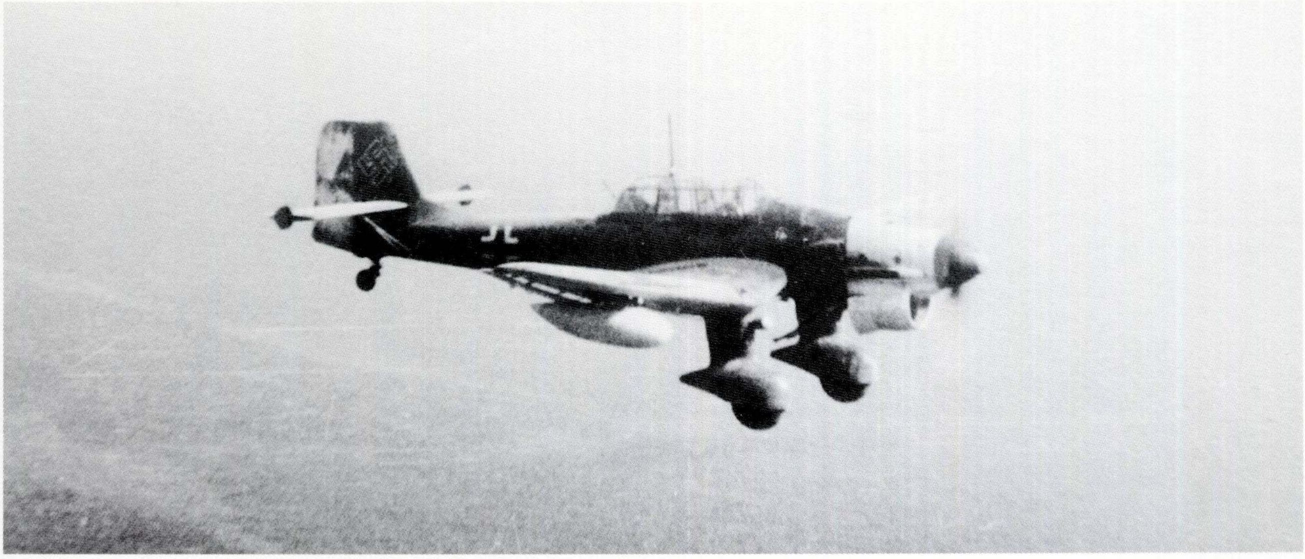


Messerschmitt Bf 109 E of III./JG 77, Balkans, 1941
Despite the prominent fuselage markings of II.(Schlacht)/LG 2, it is believed that this aircraft, either an E-4/B or an E-7, was later acquired and flown by III./JG 77.

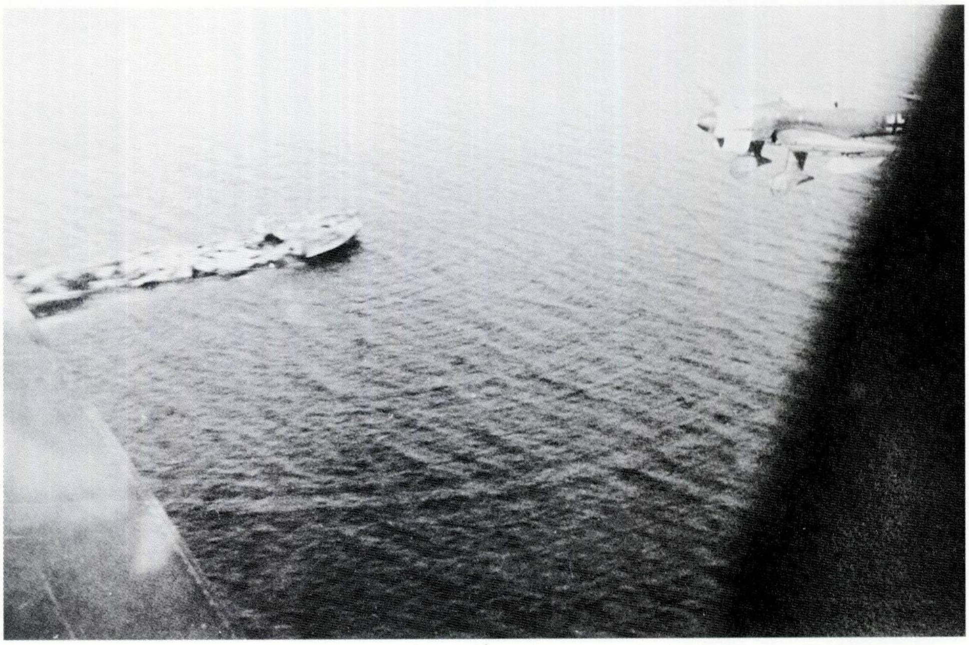


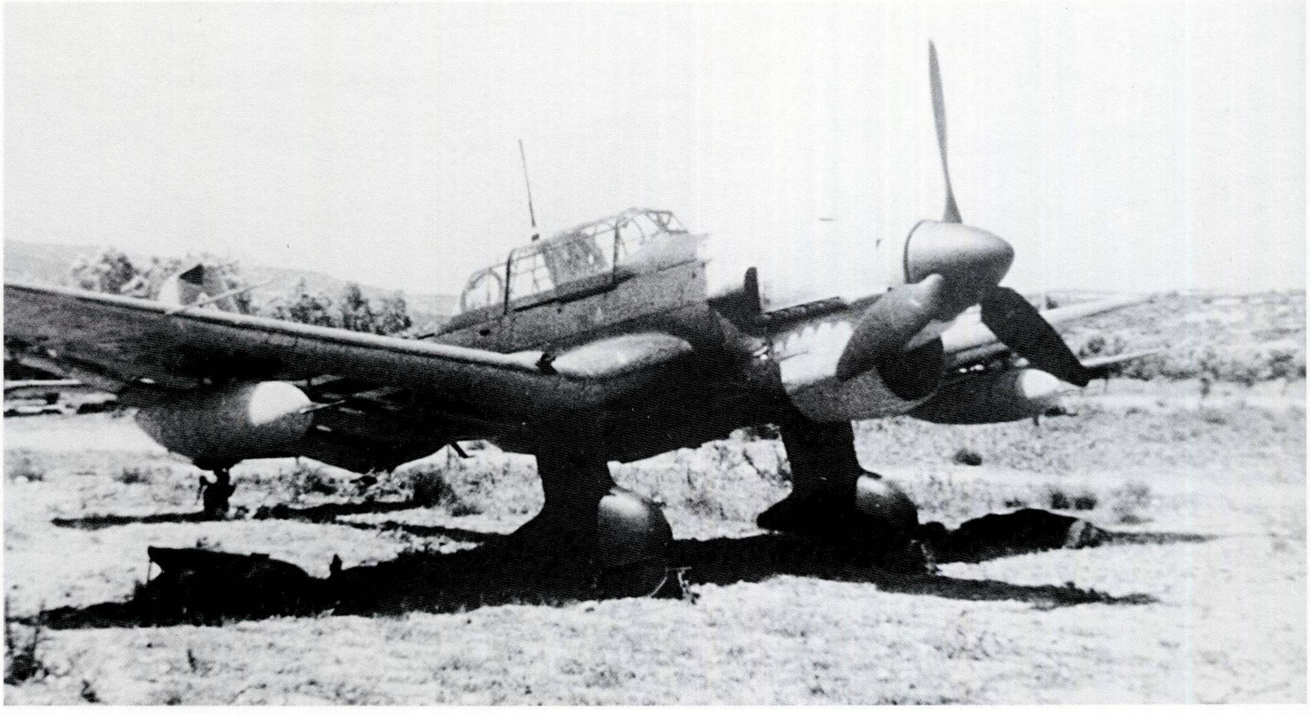


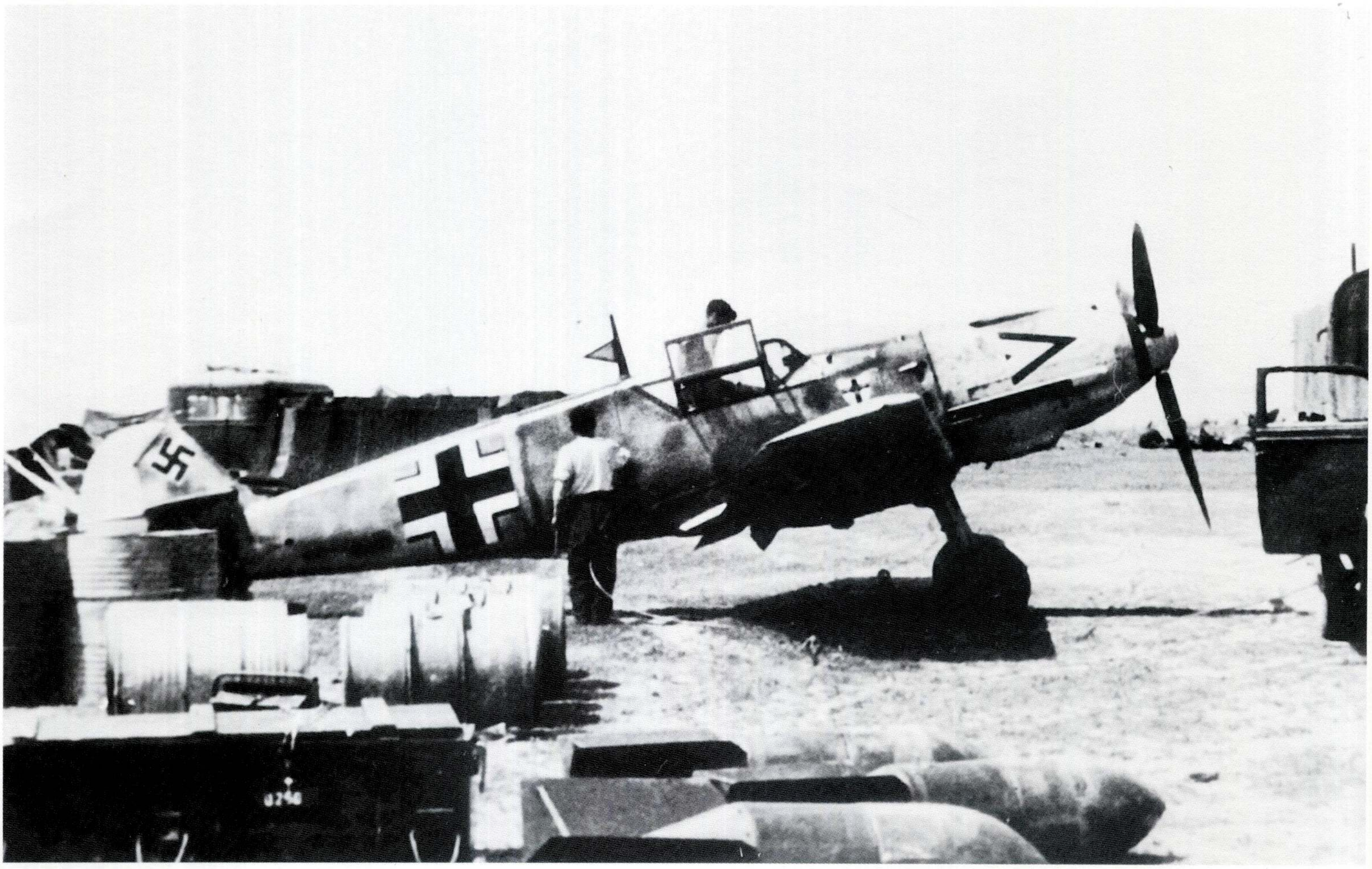
ABOVE AND LEFT: Aircraft of III./JG 77 on the airfield at Üsküp, known today as Skopje, the capital of Macedonia, showing a variety of markings. Interesting is the aircraft seen on the far left of the photograph (*ABOVE*), marked with a 'Red 6' and red wavy Gruppe bar, still bearing the badge of JG 2 under the windscreen. The machine (*LEFT*), also with the 'Richthofen' badge of JG 2, has only a yellow fuselage band and no aircraft number. Note also the yellow wingtip and the old style fuselage Balkenkreuz. A single victory bar was painted on the rudder.

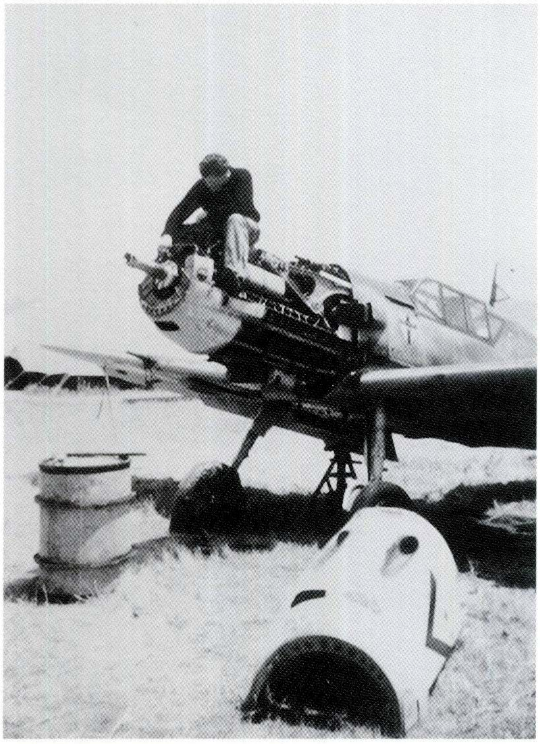


The Ju 87 dive-bombers of I./St.G. 3 under Hptm. Walter Sigel were very active in the Balkan campaigns. The aircraft seen here are Ju 87 R-2s and carry 300 litre drop tanks under each wing. (*RIGHT*) Wrecks of ships damaged by German attacks, photographed by Uffz. Josef Bössenecker, a wireless operator/rear gunner serving with I./St.G. 3 who later joined JG 5.



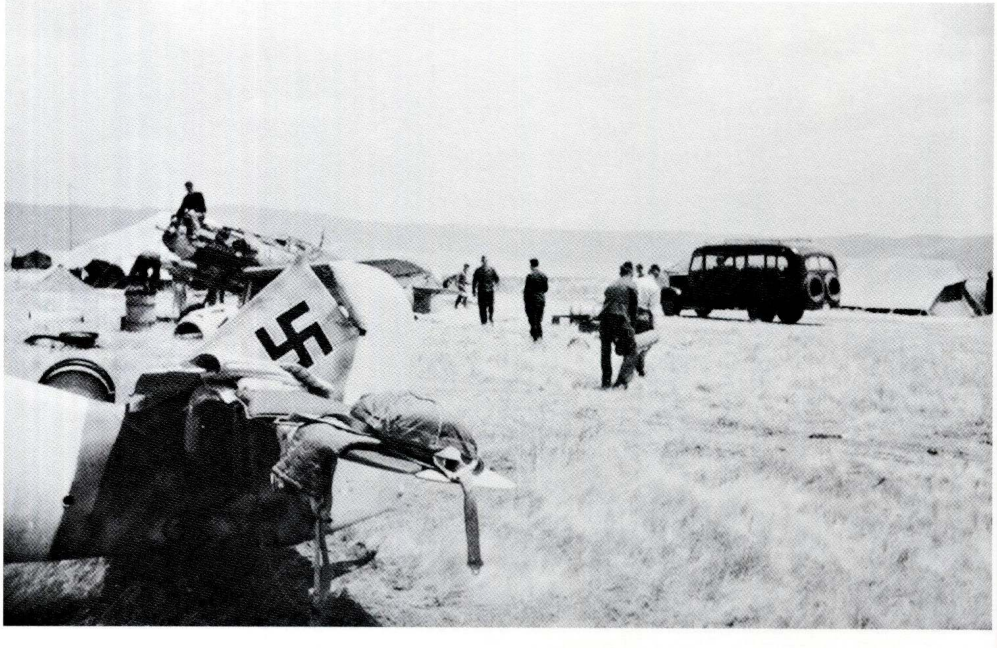




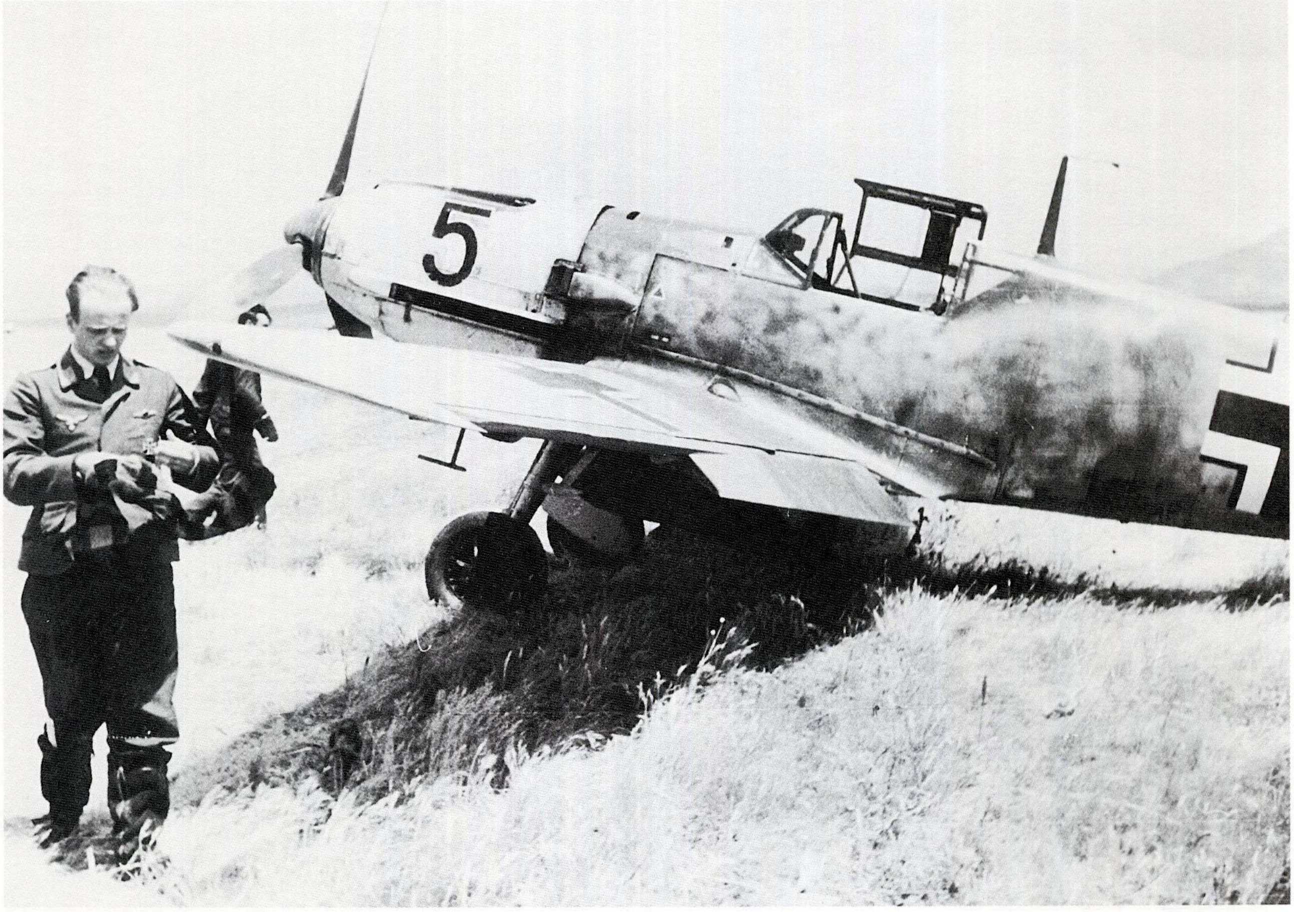


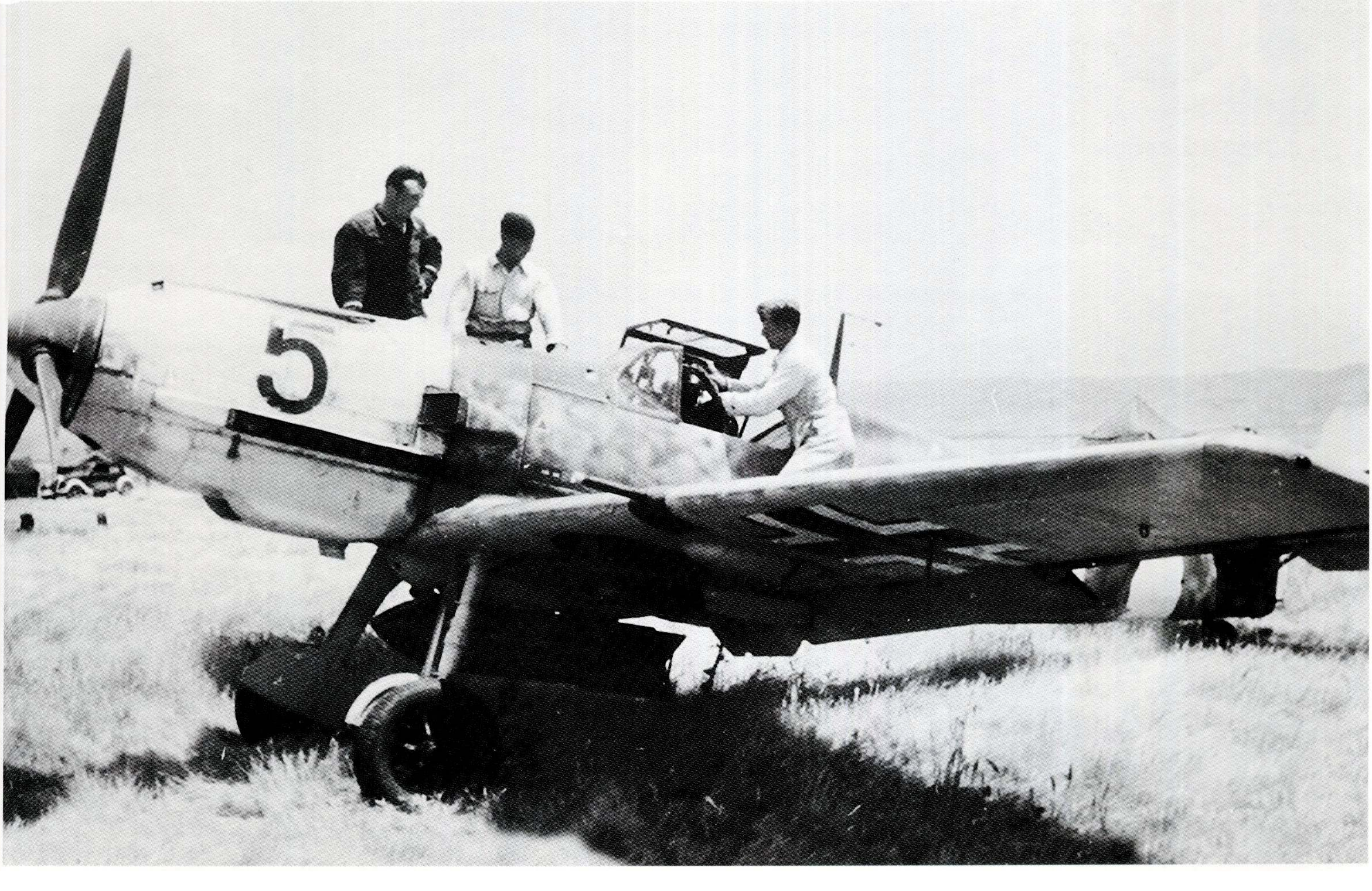
ABOVE AND LEFT: The Bf 109 E-7 flown in the Balkan campaign by Hptm. Max Dobislav, Gruppenkommandeur of III./JG 27 in April 1941. Note that the Stab marking on the nose comprises a chevron, within which is a small triangle, and that a command pennant is attached to the radio mast.

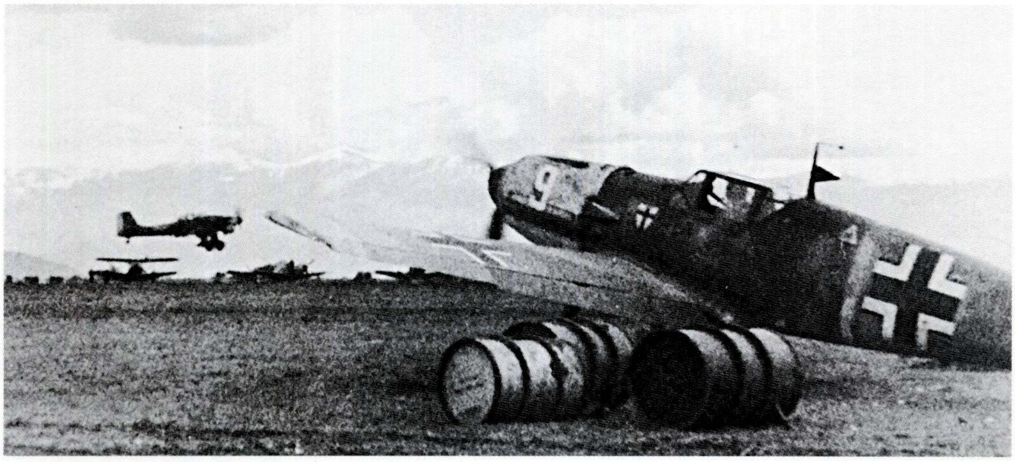
BELOW: When his Stab aircraft was unserviceable or otherwise not available, Hptm. Max Dobislav frequently flew the 'Black 5', W.Nr. 5578 of 8./JG 27. In this photograph, Dobislav's normal Stab machine is seen in the background while, in the foreground, is the tail of 'Black 5' laden with the pilot's parachute, life jacket and dinghy.



RIGHT AND BELOW: Two clearer photographs of Hptm. Dobislav's reserve machine, 'Black 5', W.Nr. 5578, shown in May 1941 when III./JG 27 was based in Sicily. These photographs were taken shortly before the pilot took off on a Jabo mission.

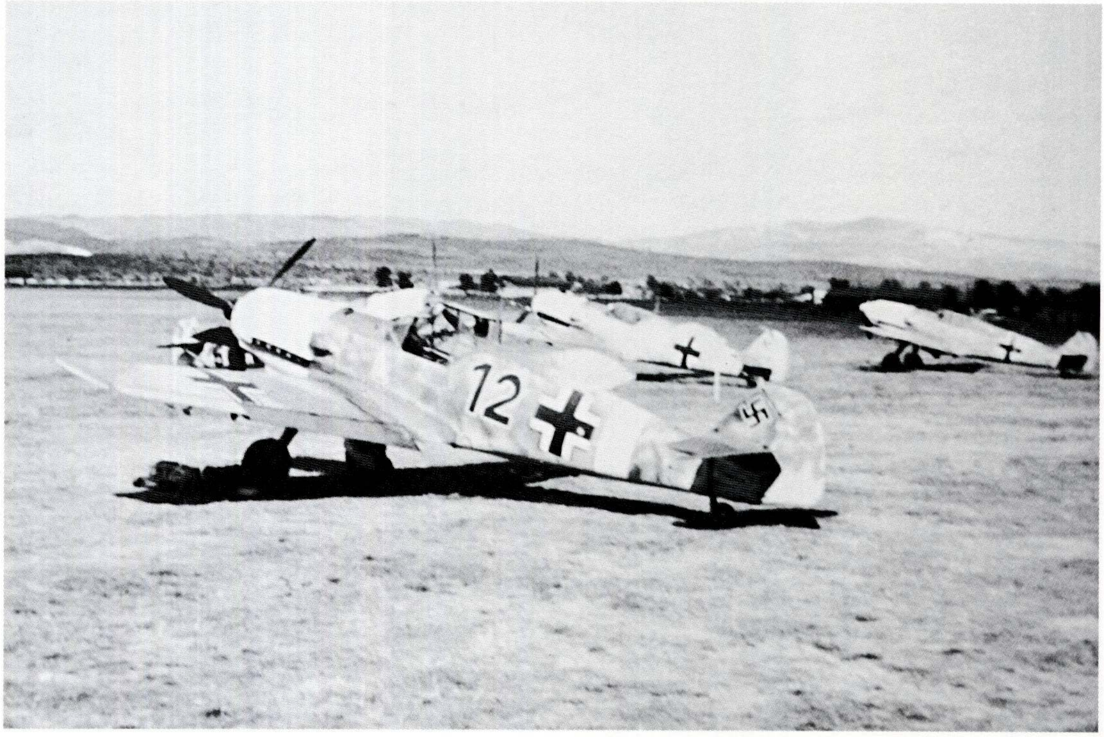


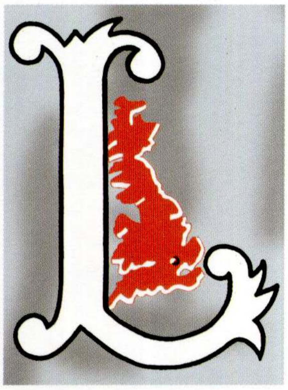




LEFT: This aircraft, 'White 9', is believed to have been flown by Oblt. Erhard Braune, the Staffelkapitän of 7./JG 27 and was probably photographed at Kozani. The Staffelkapitän's pennant was attached to the radio mast and the aircraft had a narrow yellow band ahead of the Balkenkreuz. At this time, although it was usual for the Staffelkapitän to fly an aircraft marked '1', the use of other aircraft was not unknown.

RIGHT: 'Black 12' of 2.(J)./LG 2 in the Balkans. Note the yellow engine cowling and fuselage band and the emblem of I. Gruppe under the cockpit which shows a map of Great Britain enclosed within an ornate letter 'L'.

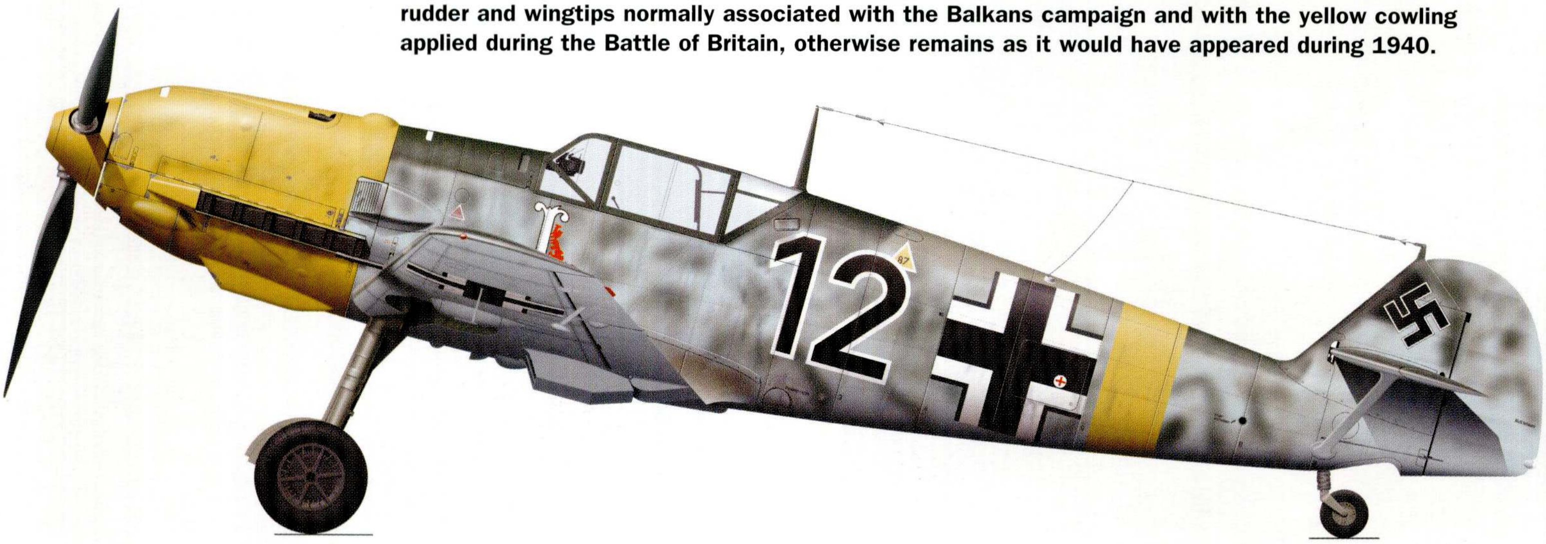




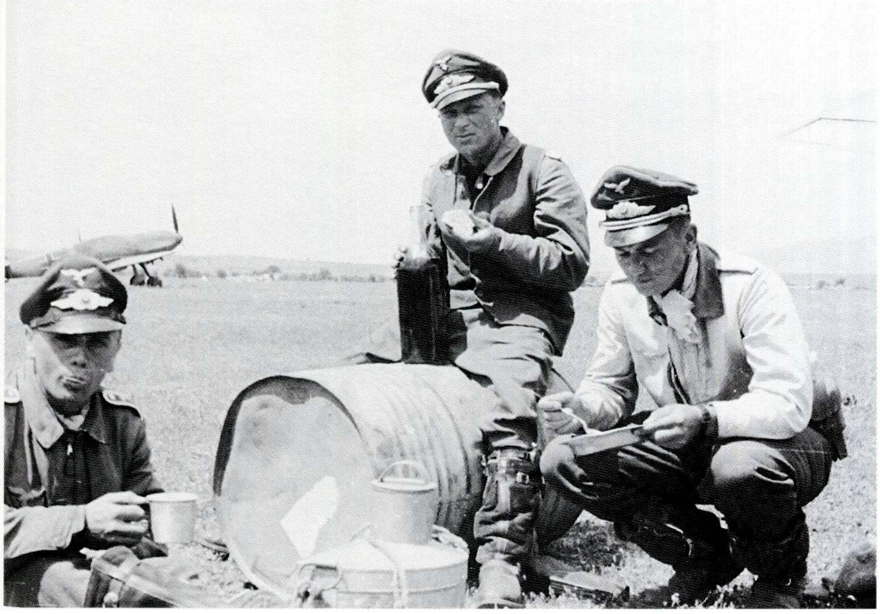
I.(Jagd)/LG 2 emblem

Messerschmitt Bf 109 E 'Black 12' of 2.(J)/LG 2, Balkans, 1941

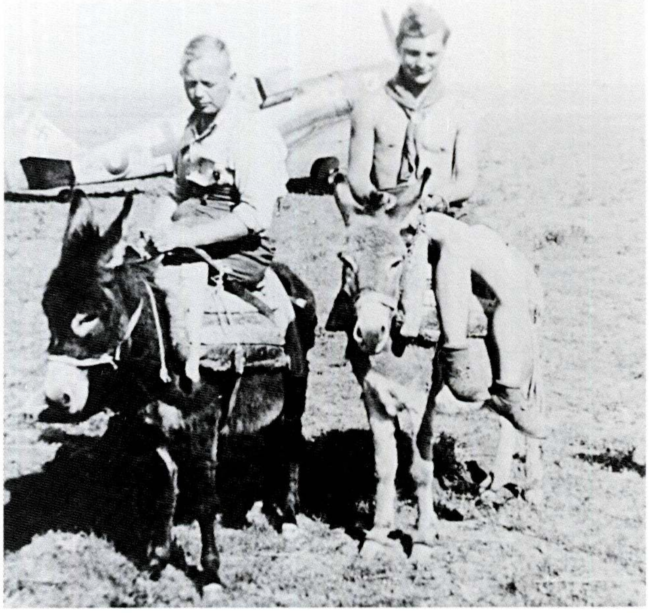
Finished in a 71/02/65 scheme with neatly mottled fuselage sides, this aircraft is believed to have been an E-4 and carries the emblem of I.(Jagd)/LG 2 below the windscreen. Although a yellow band has been added to the rear fuselage, the machine lacks the characteristic yellow rudder and wingtips normally associated with the Balkans campaign and with the yellow cowling applied during the Battle of Britain, otherwise remains as it would have appeared during 1940.



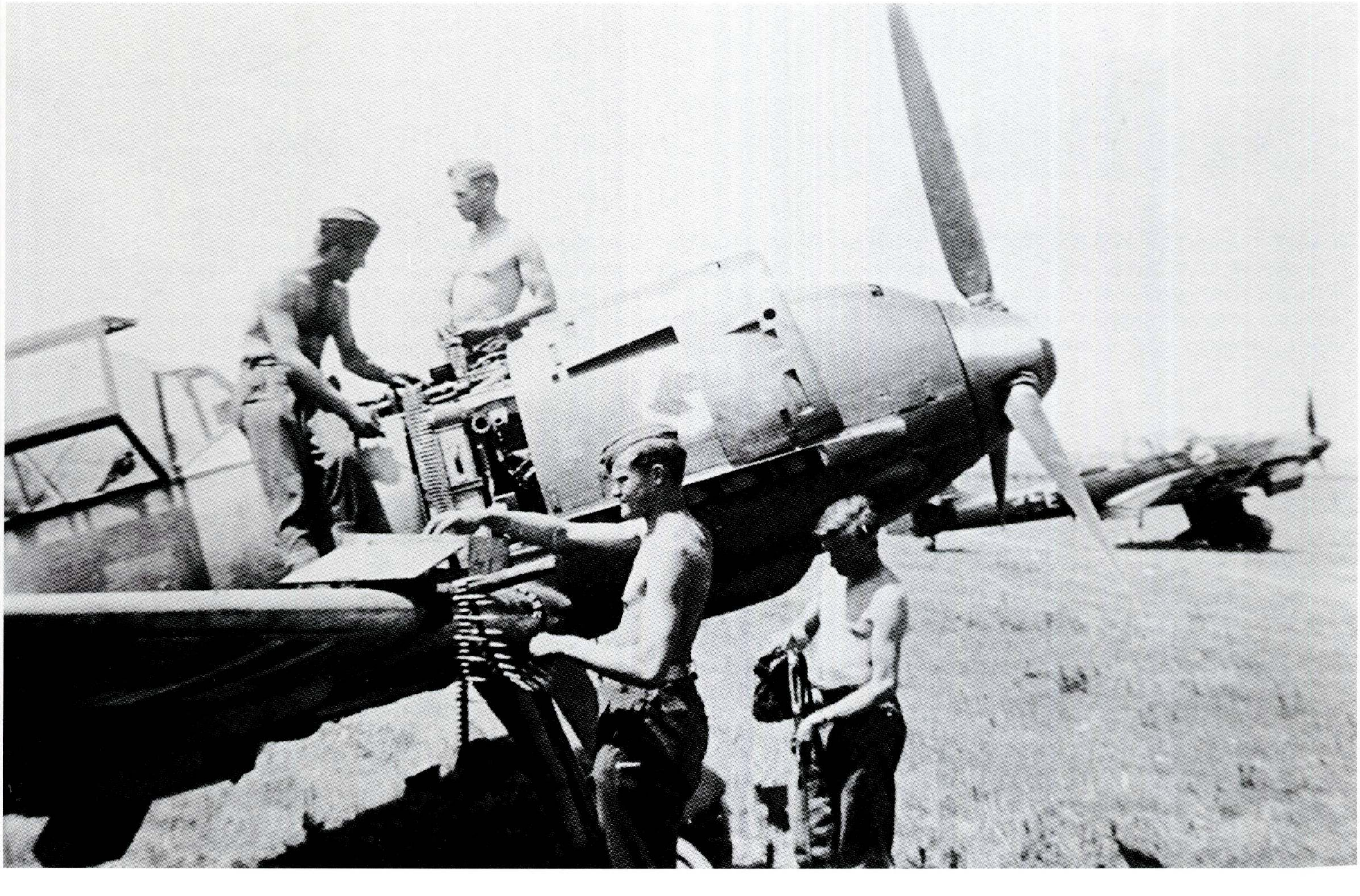
BELOW: Pilots of 9./JG 77 photographed at Tanagra, late April 1941. From left to right: Fw. Wilhelm Baumgartner, later killed in action on 11 April 1943; Oblt. Kurt Lasse, the Staffelkapitän, killed 8 October 1941, and Lt. Emil Omert, killed 24 April 1944. The latter two pilots both became Ritterkreuzträger, Lasse's Knight's Cross being awarded posthumously on 3 May 1942, some seven months after his death. Omert was awarded his Ritterkreuz on 19 March 1942 when he had more than 40 air victories.

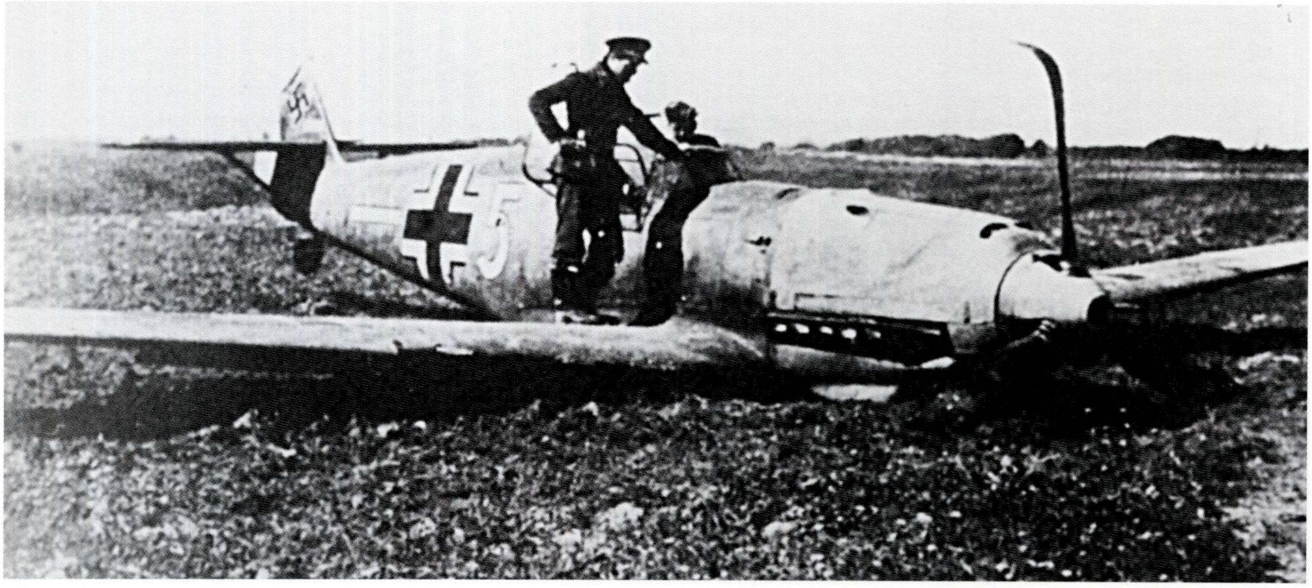


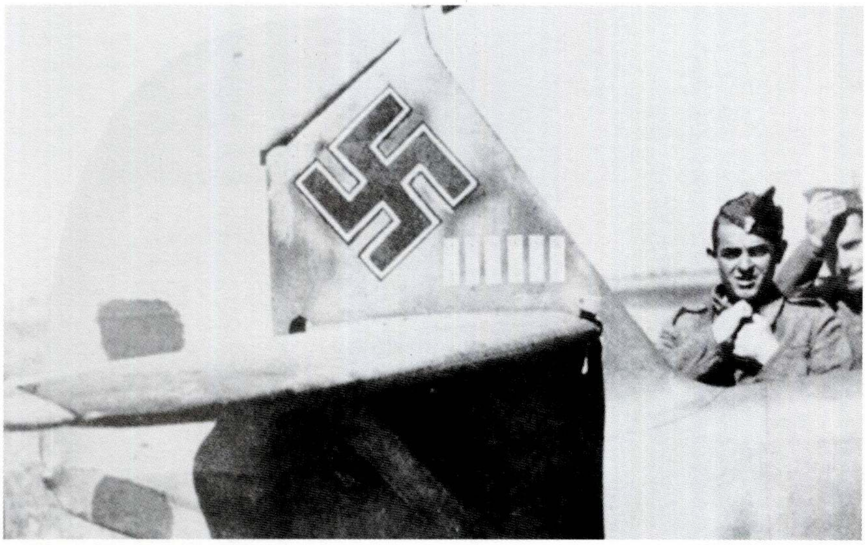
BELOW: Fw. Karl-Paul List (left) and Sanitäts Uffz. Krause, both members of the ground personnel of III./JG 77, photographed on Tanagra airfield.



BELOW: Armourers reloading a Bf 109 E of III./JG 77. In the background is a Ju 87 of I./St.G 2, commanded at this time by Hptm. Hubertus Hitschhold, later appointed General der Schlachtflieger.





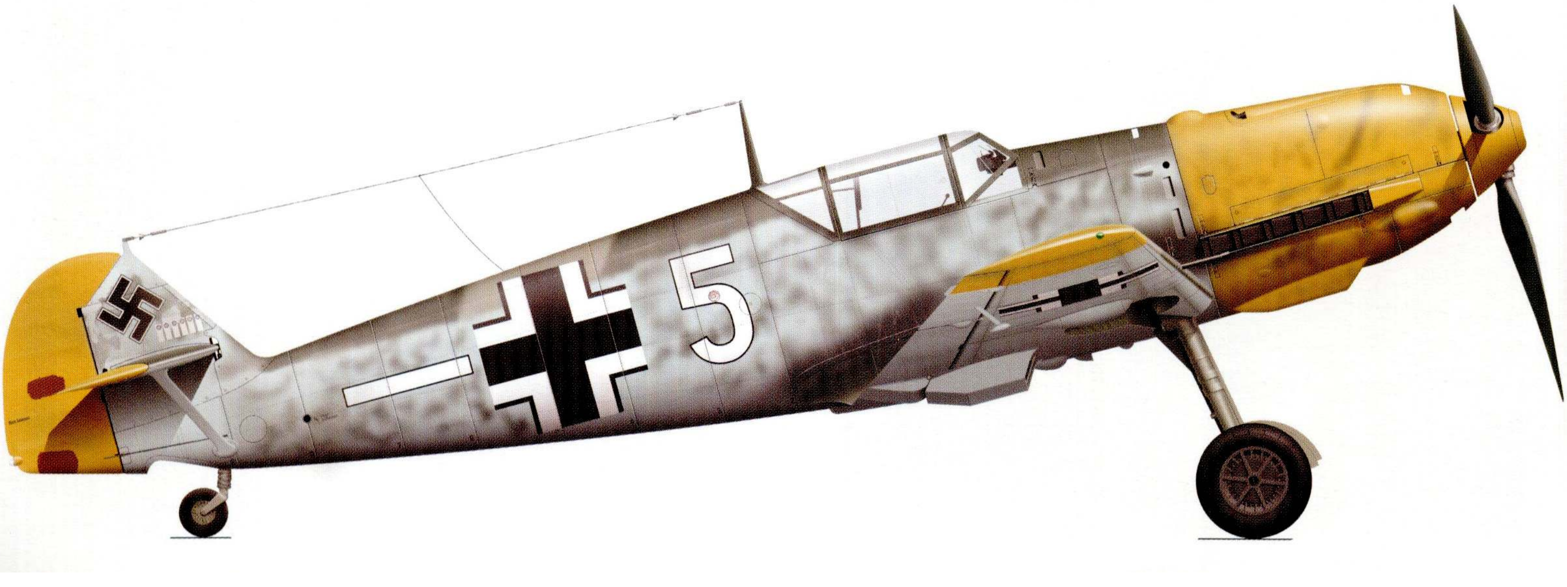


ABOVE: On 15 April 1941, Lt. Jakob Arnoldy of 4./JG 77 had to make an emergency landing following an engagement with Hurricanes. Arnoldy carried out a successful emergency landing on the British-held airfield at Larissa but his subsequent fate is unknown. Here, Arnoldy's aircraft, a Bf 109 E-4, W.Nr. 1276, coded 'White 5' is being inspected by a Commonwealth pilot.

LEFT: Allied soldiers caught obviously having a quick smarten-up in the presence of the photographer in this view of the tail of 'White 5' showing Lt. Arnoldy's six victory bars. Note the yellow elevators, the areas of repainting around the Hakenkreuz and the repairs to the rudder fabric.

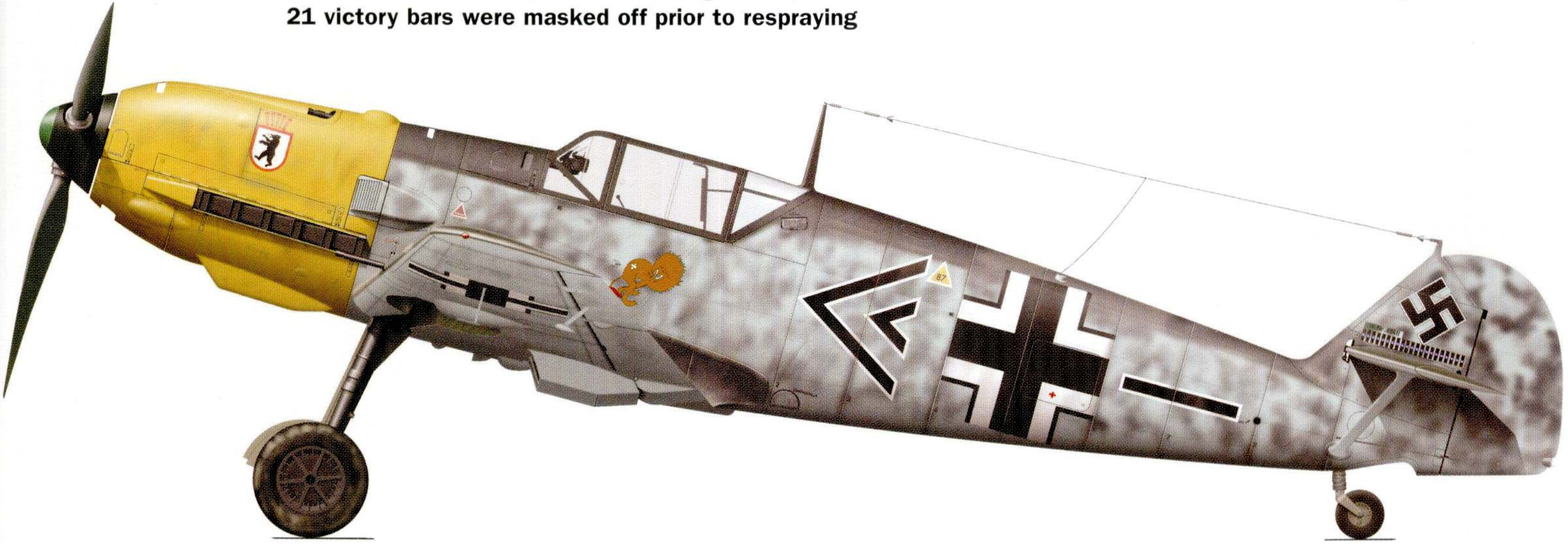
Messerschmitt Bf 109 E-4 'White 5' flown by Lt. Jakob Arnoldy of 4./JG 77, Larissa, Greece, 15 April 1941

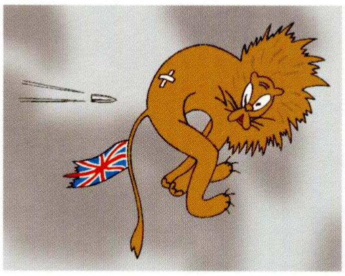
This aircraft, W.Nr. 1276, was finished in a standard 02/71 scheme with extensive areas of yellow and an overall appearance of being generally well used. In particular, the yellow nose was well weathered and there were signs of some repainting around the tail area. Despite having six victory bars marked on his rudder, Lt. Arnoldy was credited with a seventh, a Hurricane, shot down shortly before he made a forced landing on Larissa aerodrome. As mentioned in the main text, his subsequent fate is unclear.



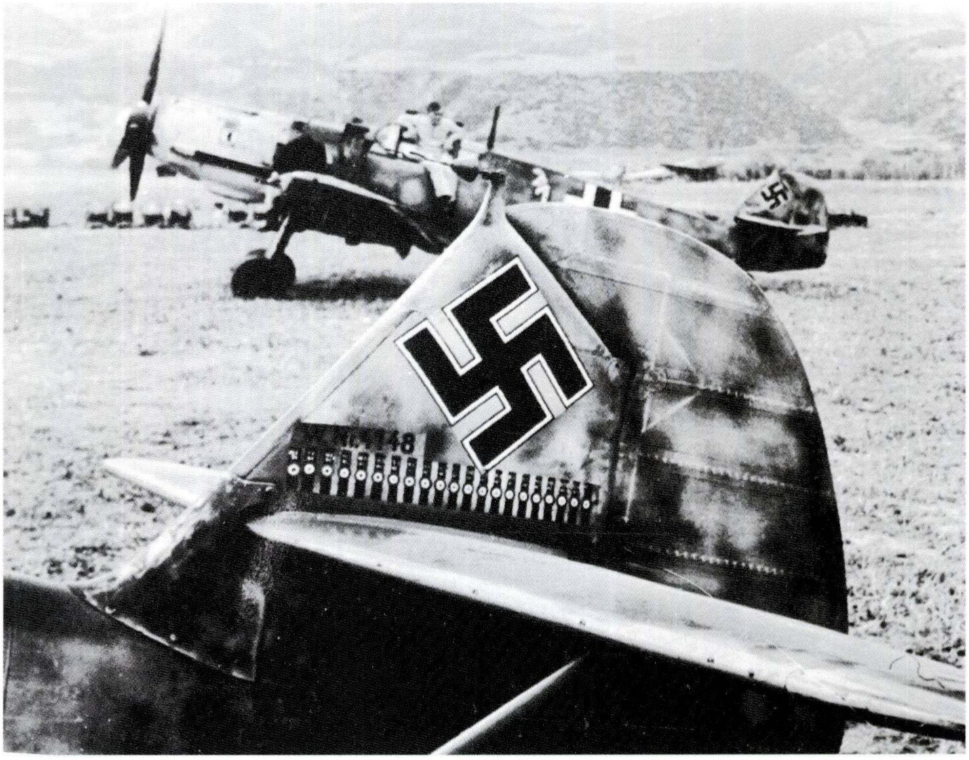
Messerschmitt Bf 109 E W.Nr. 4148, flown by Hptm. Wolfgang Lippert, Kommandeur of II./JG 27, Larissa, Greece, April, 1941

This aircraft, probably an E-4, was camouflaged in mixed greys approximating the later RLM 74 and 75 with standard Blue 65 undersurfaces. Evidence confirming the aircraft was repainted may be seen in the photograph below which shows a patch of the original 71/02 scheme on the fin where the W.Nr. and the first eight of the 21 victory bars were masked off prior to respraying

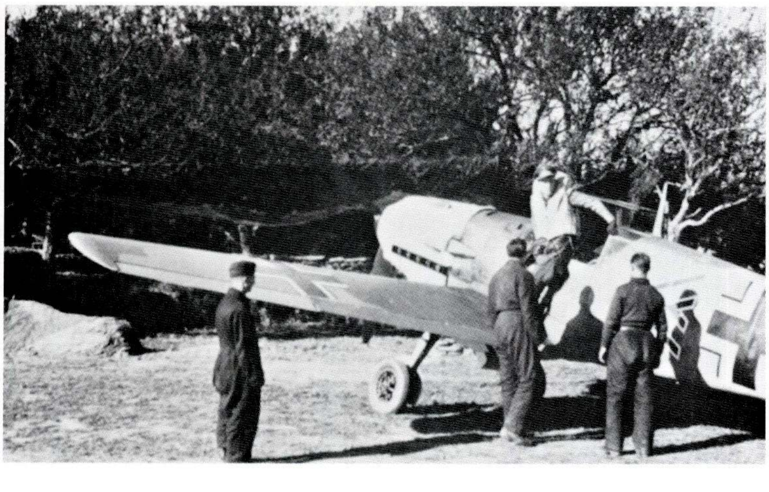


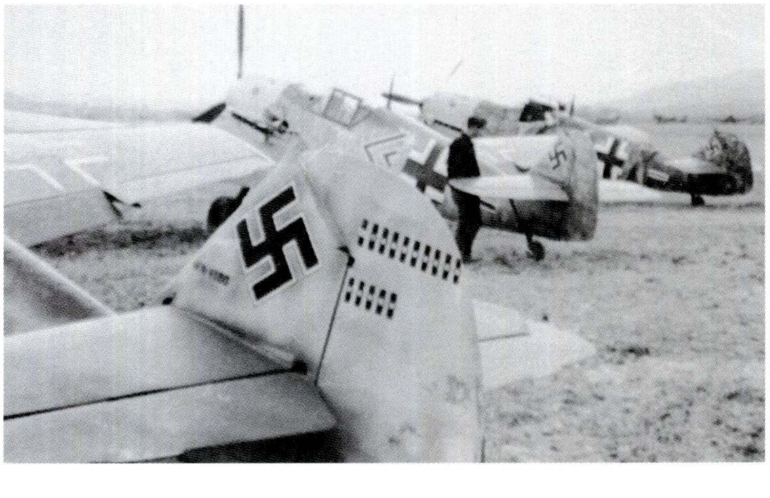


II./JG 27 emblem



BELOW: The Bf 109 E, W.Nr. 4148, flown by Hptm. Wolfgang Lippert, Kommandeur of II./JG 27, shortly after landing at Larissa in Greece. (*BELOW RIGHT*) The same aircraft is in the centre of this line-up, probably again at Larissa. The machine in the foreground, W.Nr. 4180, is believed to be that flown by Oblt. Gustav Rödel, although why it is marked with only 15 victory bars when Rödel claimed his 15th, 16th and 17th victories all on 15 April 1941, remains a mystery. (*RIGHT*) A similar mystery concerns this photograph showing the tail of Lippert's W.Nr. 4148 marked with 21 victory bars, as this pilot's 21st victory, a Hurricane shot down near Buq Buq in North Africa, was not achieved until the morning of 23 October 1941. This discrepancy could be explained by the fact that either the first five bars signify victories claimed in Spain or, alternatively, represent barrage balloons shot down during the Battle of Britain.

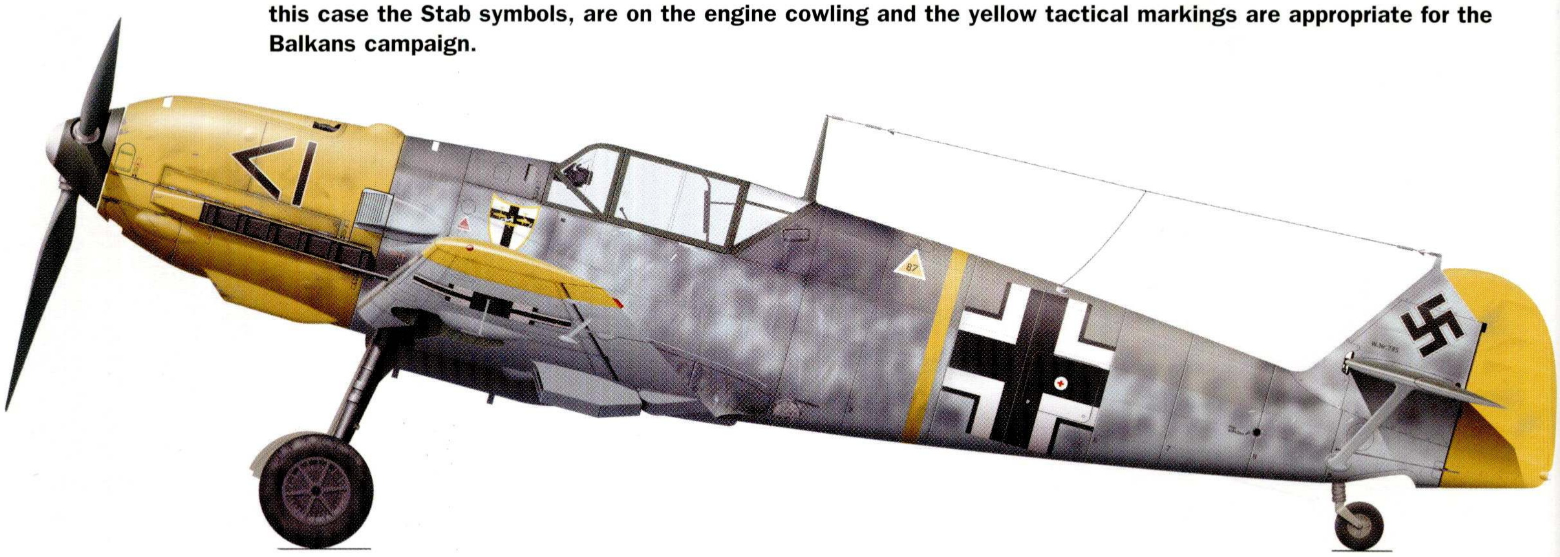




LEFT: Two pilots of II./JG 77 at Axiopolis. On the right is the Kommandeur, Hptm. Franz-Heinz Lange, who was killed on 23 April 1941 when his aircraft received a direct hit from anti-aircraft fire and crashed at Karopion. Lange, an East Prussian, had previously been the Staffelkapitän of 6./JG 77 and had claimed two victories in Norway before being appointed Kommandeur. The pilot on the left is Oblt. Hans Brockmann.

Messerchmitt Bf 109 E-4/B of Gruppenstab III./JG 27, Kozani, Greece, mid-April 1941

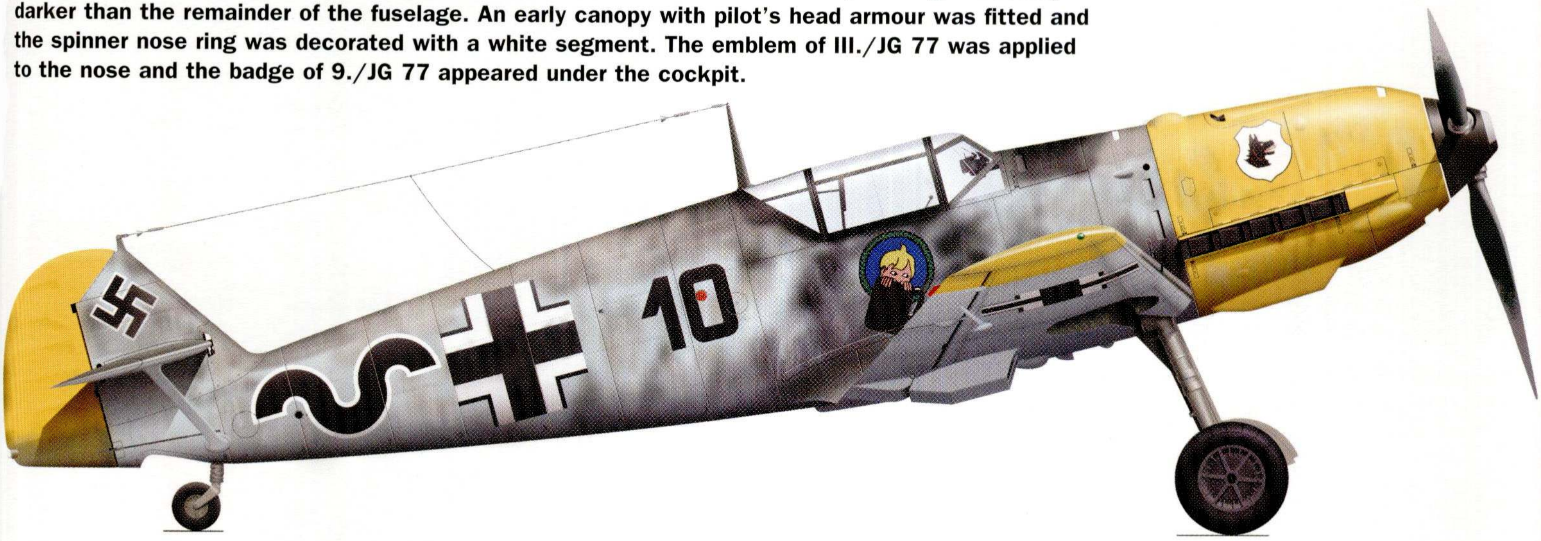
This fighter-bomber, or Jabo, W.Nr.785, was finished in a mixed grey and 02 scheme with mottled mixed greys on the fuselage sides and 71 canopy framing. As with other aircraft of III./JG 27, the individual aircraft markings, in this case the Stab symbols, are on the engine cowling and the yellow tactical markings are appropriate for the Balkans campaign.

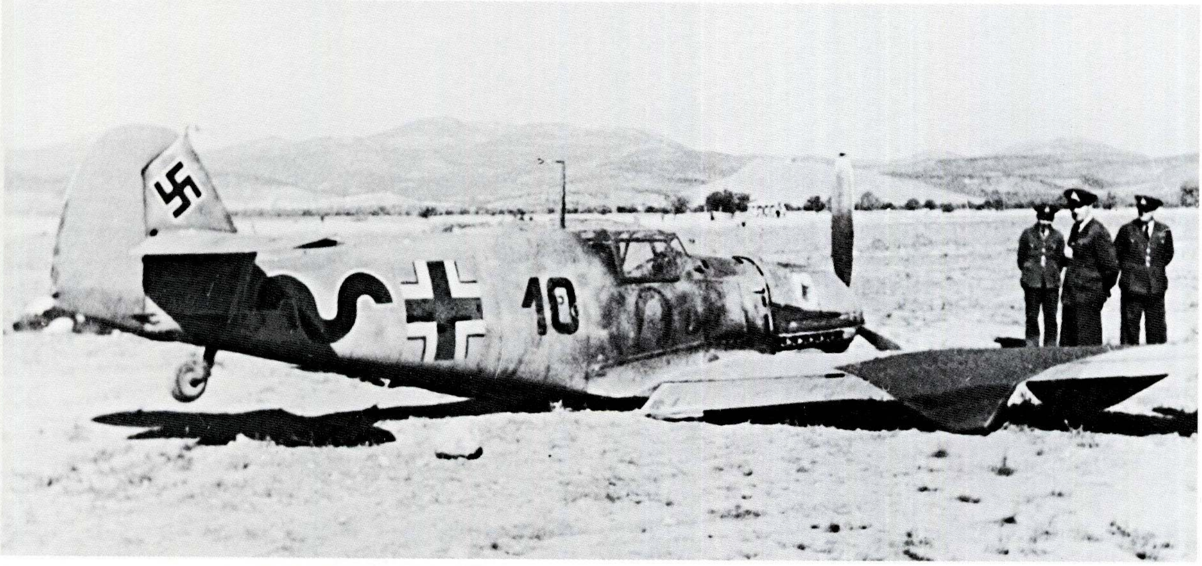


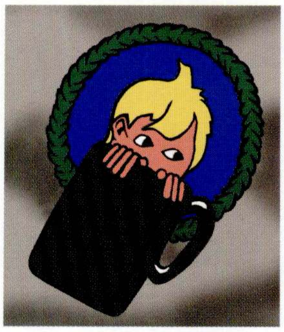
LEFT : Between 16 and 21 April, III./JG 27 was based on the Greek airfield at Kozani where this photograph was taken, showing, on the right, Oblt. Herbert Wasserzier of 7./JG 27 shortly before his death. On 20 April 1941, Oblt. Wasserzier was strafing Tanagra airfield when his machine, W.Nr. 5928, was hit by anti-aircraft fire and crashed.

Messerschmitt Bf 109 E 'Black 10' of 9./JG 77, Greece, April 1941

This aircraft, either a standard E-1 or an E-1 partially modified to E-7 configuration but lacking wing cannon, was camouflaged in a 71/02 scheme with the finish under the cockpit being noticeably darker than the remainder of the fuselage. An early canopy with pilot's head armour was fitted and the spinner nose ring was decorated with a white segment. The emblem of III./JG 77 was applied to the nose and the badge of 9./JG 77 appeared under the cockpit.

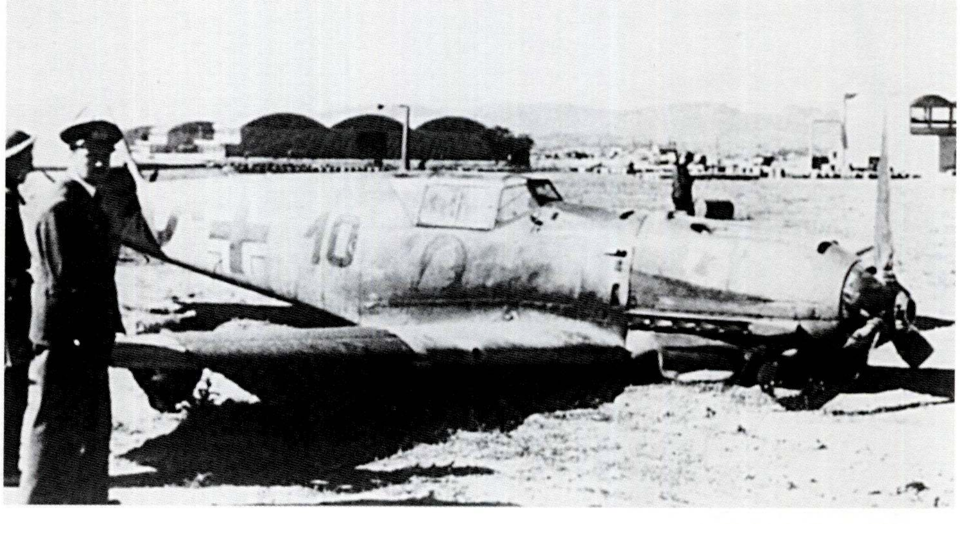


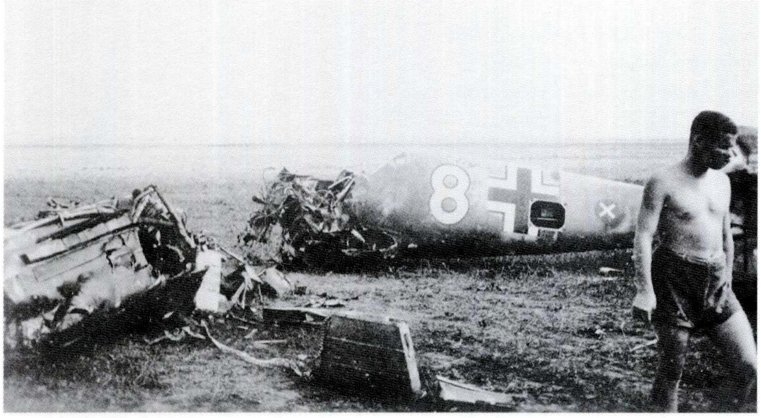


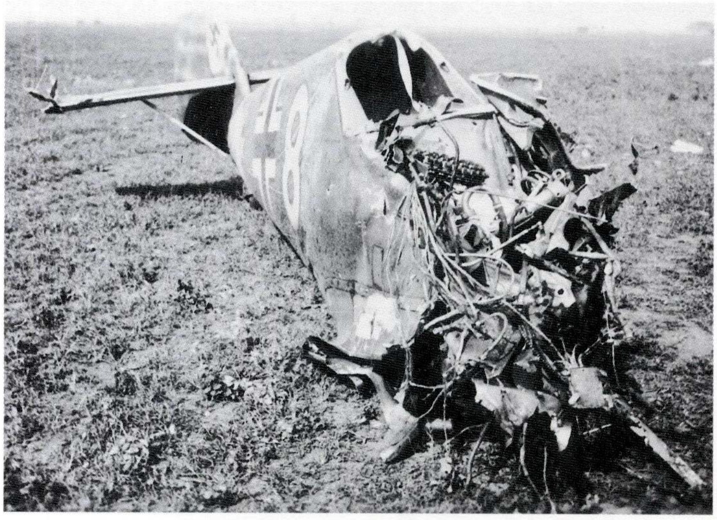


9./JG 77 emblem

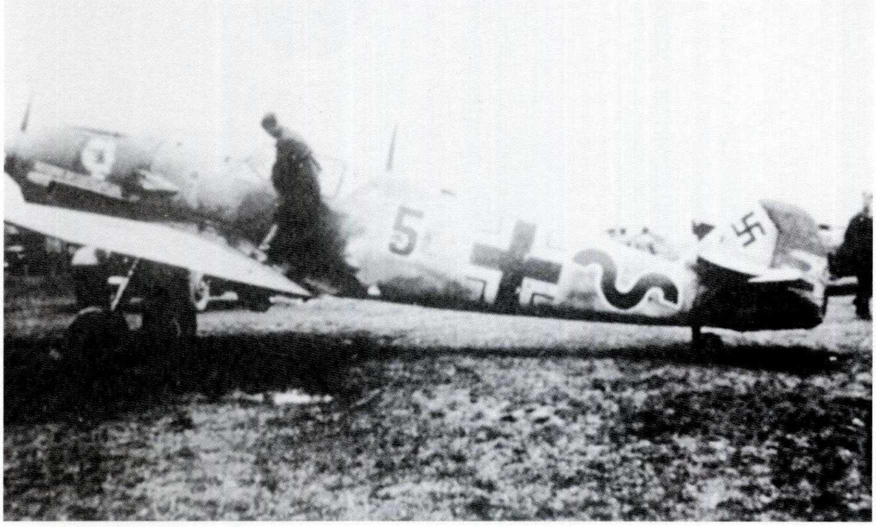
ABOVE AND RIGHT: Some historians maintain that these photographs of 'Black 10' show the aircraft flown by Uffz. Fritz Borchert of 9./JG 77 after it crash-landed on Larissa airfield on 20 April 1941, on which date Uffz. Borchert was indeed posted missing in action in the Larissa area. Luftwaffe records state that Borchert was shot down by anti-aircraft defences, but it is possible that his aircraft was damaged by a Hurricane flown by the top-scoring RAF pilot S/Ldr. Marmaduke 'Pat' Pattle of 33 Squadron, who was himself shot down the same day. Although Borchert is thought to have escaped capture, nothing is known of his ultimate career, possibly because he may have returned to his Staffel with wounds which prevented him from further flying. Assuming the Luftwaffe's loss records to be correct, it should be pointed out, however, that they state Borchert's aircraft, W.Nr. 3282, was a Bf 109 E-7, whereas the 'Black 10' shown here more closely resembles an E-1. In this connection it should be noted that most E-7s were not newly manufactured aircraft but were factory modified E-1s, E-3s and E-4s which, although redesignated as E-7s, retained their original W.Nr. It is therefore possible that although this aircraft has no wing cannon and still retains an early, rounded canopy, it may have been an E-1 only partly modified to E-7 standard by fitting an extra internal oil tank to the engine and adding provision for a 300 litre drop tank and bomb release mechanism below the fuselage. The emblem under the cockpit was based on the trademark of a brewery, and the combination of a large Gruppe bar and a small fuselage number is unusual. This aircraft landed with a seized engine, probably due to a loss of oil which was also the cause of the dark stain above the exhaust stubs.

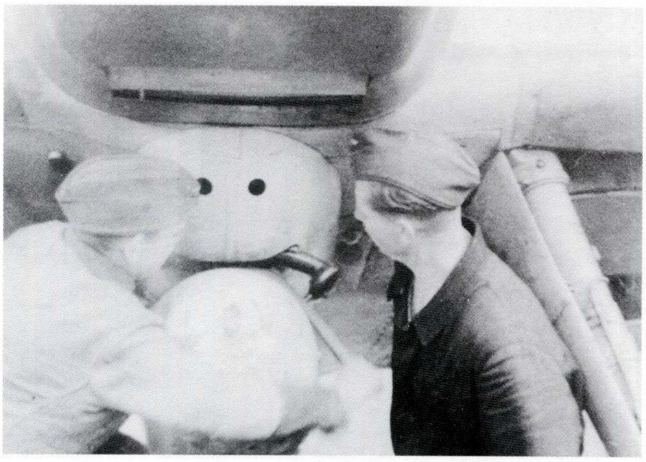






ABOVE AND ABOVE RIGHT: Two views of 'White 8' of 1.(J)/LG 2 which was destroyed at Zilistea in Rumania. Unfortunately date and exact circumstance are not known although the condition of the wreckage suggests a landing accident.



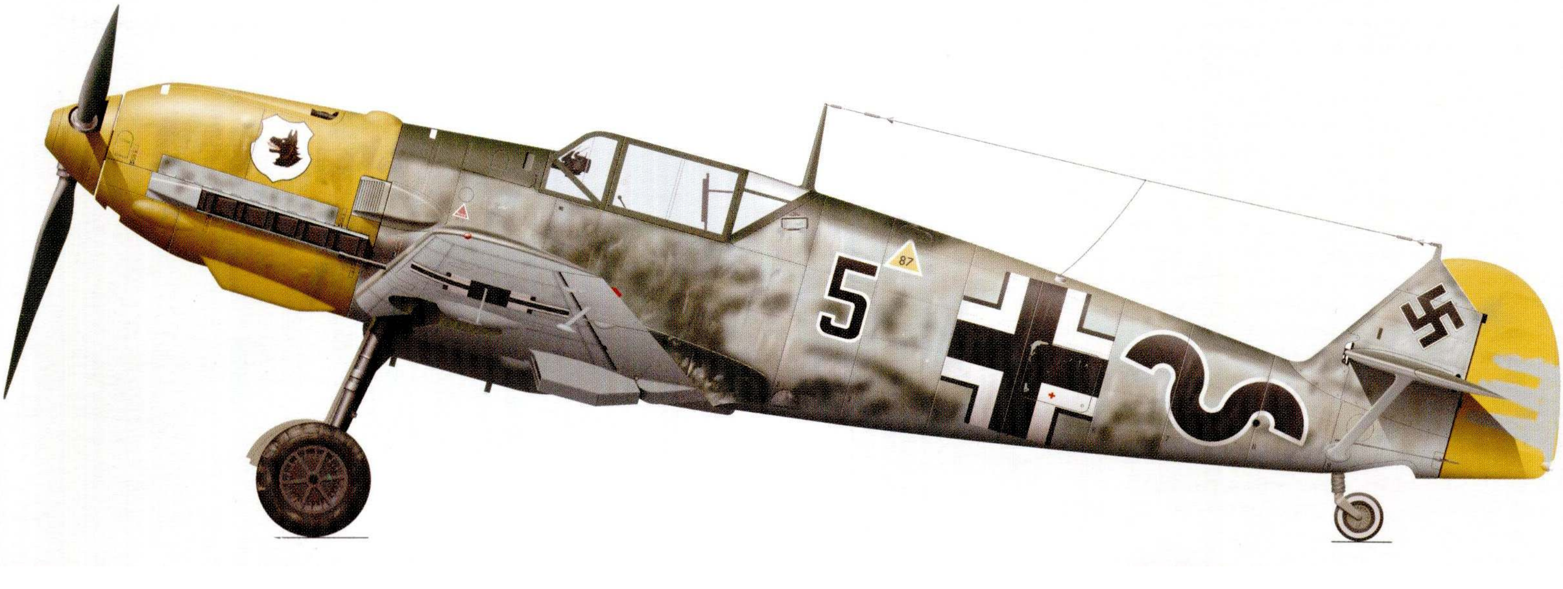


ABOVE: A Bf 109 E of III./JG 77 being loaded with a 250 kg bomb at Almiros on 22 April 1941.

ABOVE: This Bf 109 E, 'Black 5' of 8./JG 77, was photographed at Larissa on 21 April 1941.

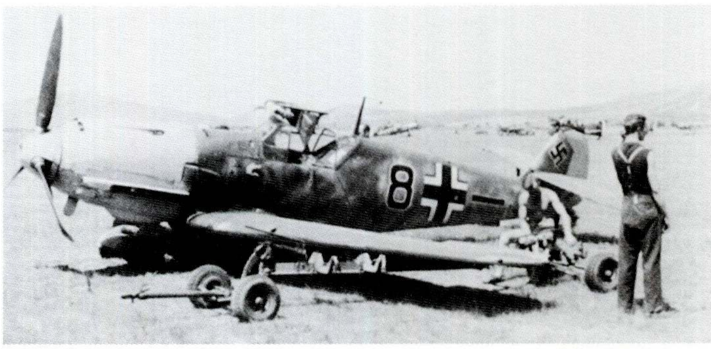
Messerschmitt Bf 109 E 'Black 5' of 8./JG 77, Larissa, Greece, 21 April 1941

On this aircraft, finished in the colours 71, 02 and 65, the 02 on the fuselage has been sprayed to avoid the fuselage cross and then darkened with mottles and streaks of 71 before the number '5' and Gruppe symbol were applied. The fin is marked with a single black victory bar and the yellow rudder shows areas of the original Blue 65 where the yellow has stripped away. As quite frequently observed, the Gruppe symbol has been incorrectly applied.

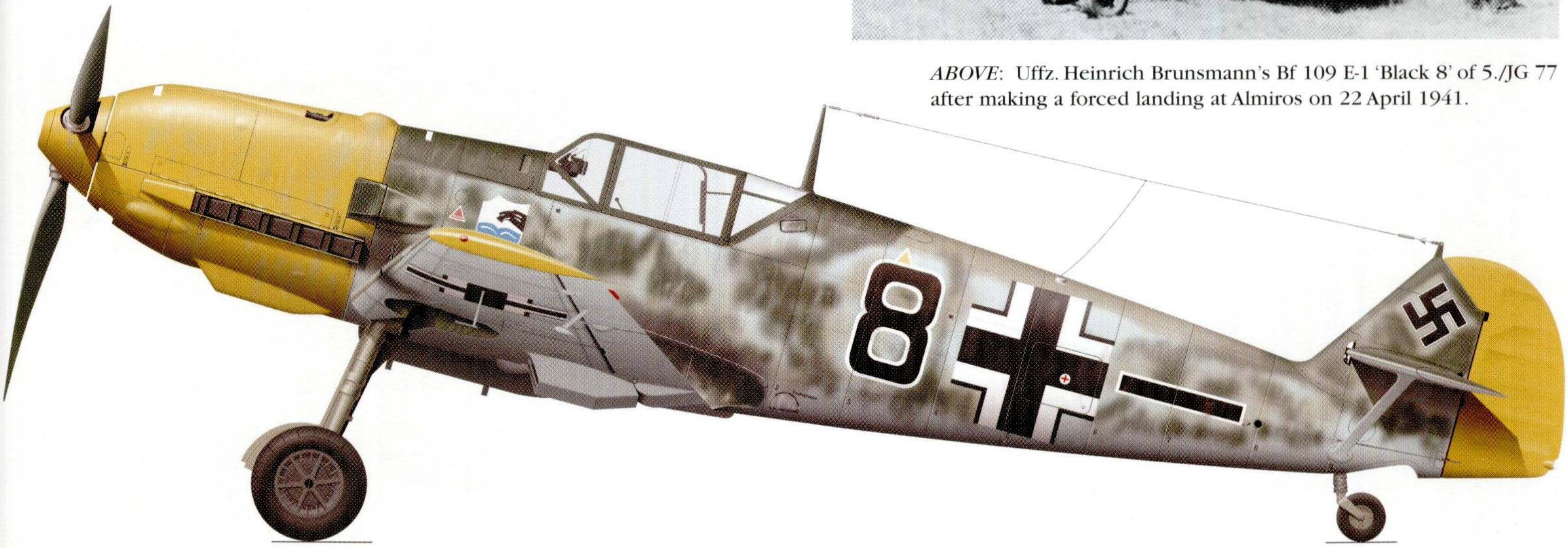


Messerschmitt Bf 109 E-1 'Black 8' flown by Uffz. Heinrich Brunsmann of 5./JG 77

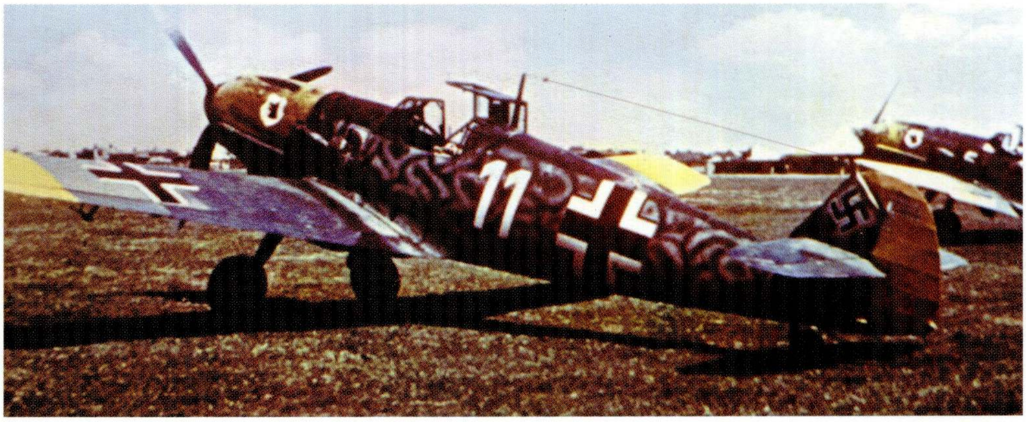
5. Staffel of JG 77 was a Jabo Staffel, hence the bomb rack fitted beneath this aircraft which had also been updated with a square canopy and curved head armour. The aircraft was camouflaged in standard 71/02/65 colours with the Blue 65 on the fuselage covered first with 02, but leaving areas of 65 visible particularly around the markings, followed by a fairly heavy application of Green 71. The emblem is the 'seeadler' (Sea Eagle) badge of II./JG 77.



ABOVE: Uffz. Heinrich Brunsmann's Bf 109 E-1 'Black 8' of 5./JG 77 after making a forced landing at Almiros on 22 April 1941.

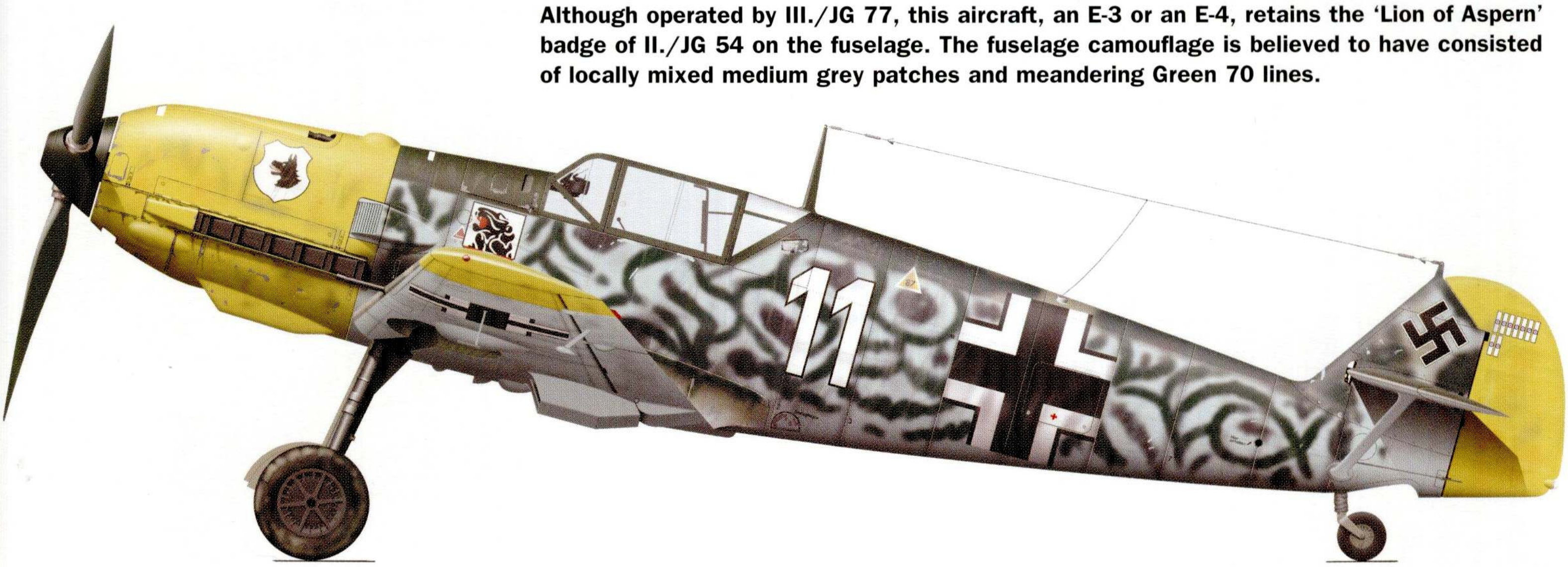


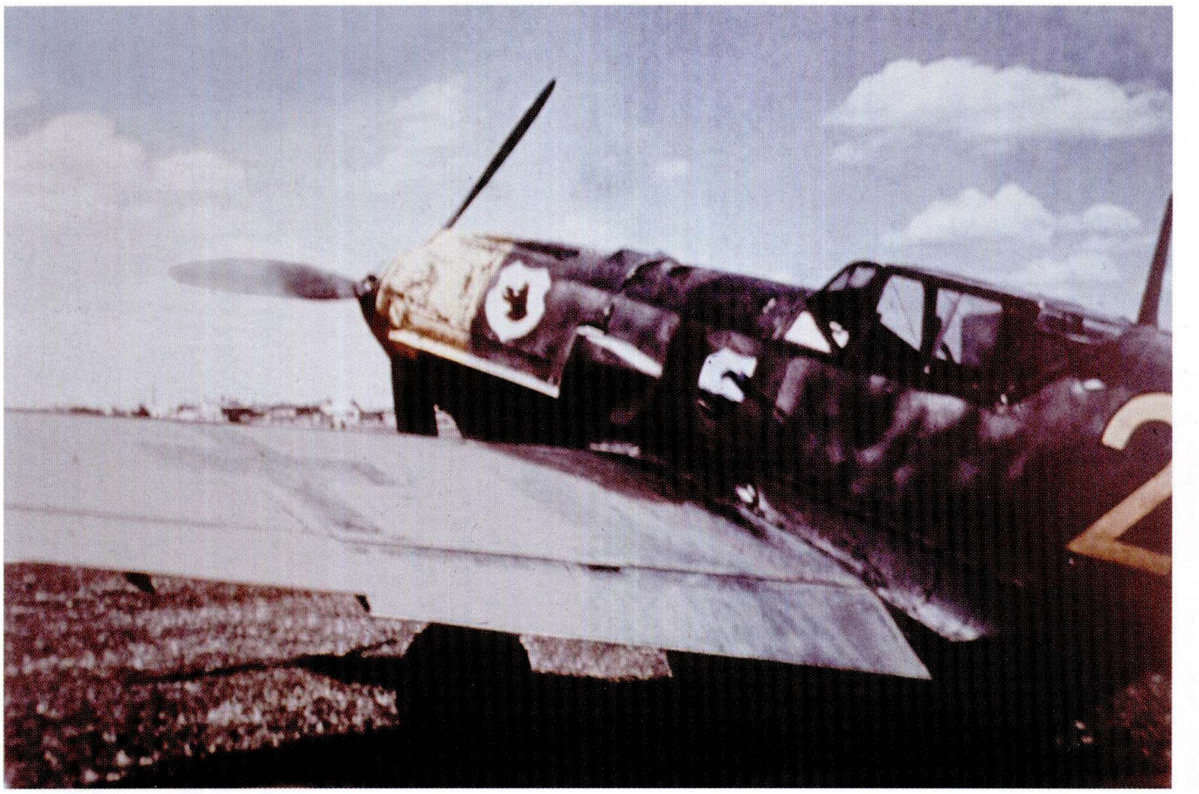
RIGHT: Still wearing the 'Lion of Aspern' badge of II./JG 54, 'White 11' obviously served with that Gruppe before being taken over by III./JG 77. Also characteristic of JG 54 is the fuselage camouflage pattern of meandering green lines which JG 54 introduced in combination with patches of RLM 02 during the final stages of the Battle of Britain. However, by comparing the 02/70 wing camouflage with that on the fuselage, it would seem that the original 02 patches on the fuselage have been replaced by a locally mixed medium grey. In any event, the camouflage has been invalidated by the bright yellow areas on the cowling, rudder and wingtips. The machine was photographed in May 1941, and although an impressive array of victory bars is visible on the rudder, the name of the pilot is not known.



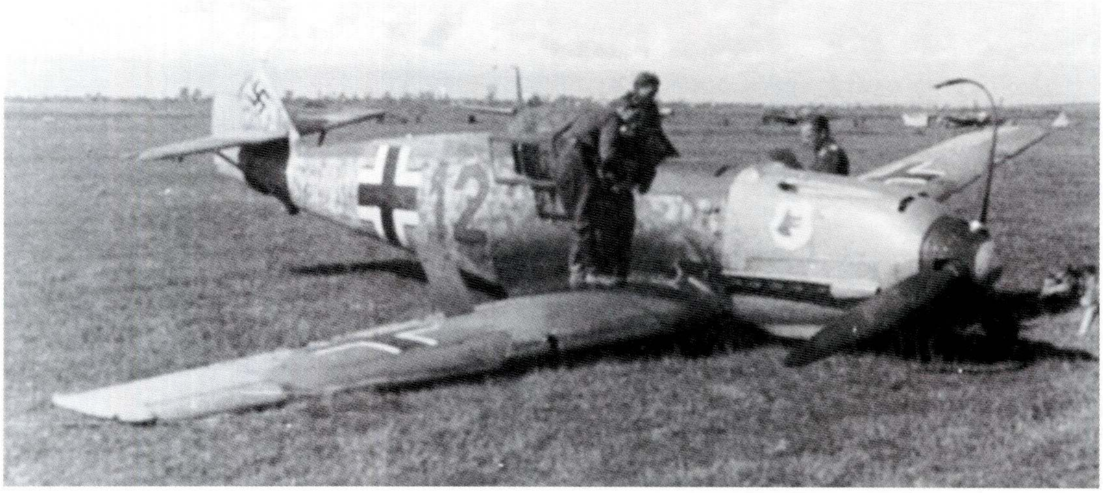
Messerschmitt Bf 109 E 'White 11' of III./JG 77, Balkans, May 1941

Although operated by III./JG 77, this aircraft, an E-3 or an E-4, retains the 'Lion of Aspern' badge of II./JG 54 on the fuselage. The fuselage camouflage is believed to have consisted of locally mixed medium grey patches and meandering Green 70 lines.





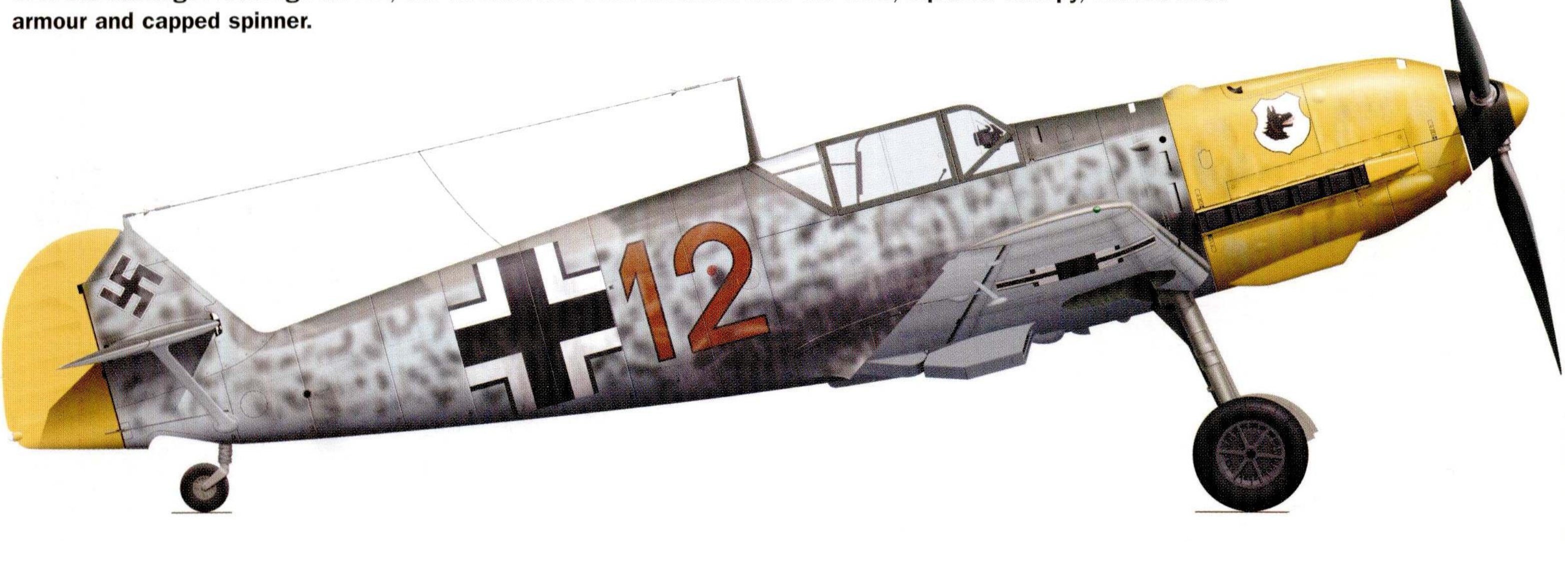
LEFT: This Bf 109, 'Yellow 2' of III./JG 77, was photographed in May 1941. The Seeadler emblem immediately behind the supercharger intake indicates that this aircraft was originally on the strength of II./JG 77 before being taken over by III. Gruppe, the emblem of which has been applied to the engine cowling. This machine also displays a modified camouflage scheme in that while the fuselage appears to be a standard 02/70 mottle, the wing uppersurfaces have been toned down with an overspray of either 02 or a mixed light grey.



RIGHT: Bf 109 E-1 'Brown 12' of 9./JG 77 after a forced landing, probably at Molaoi in the Peloponnese, May 1941.

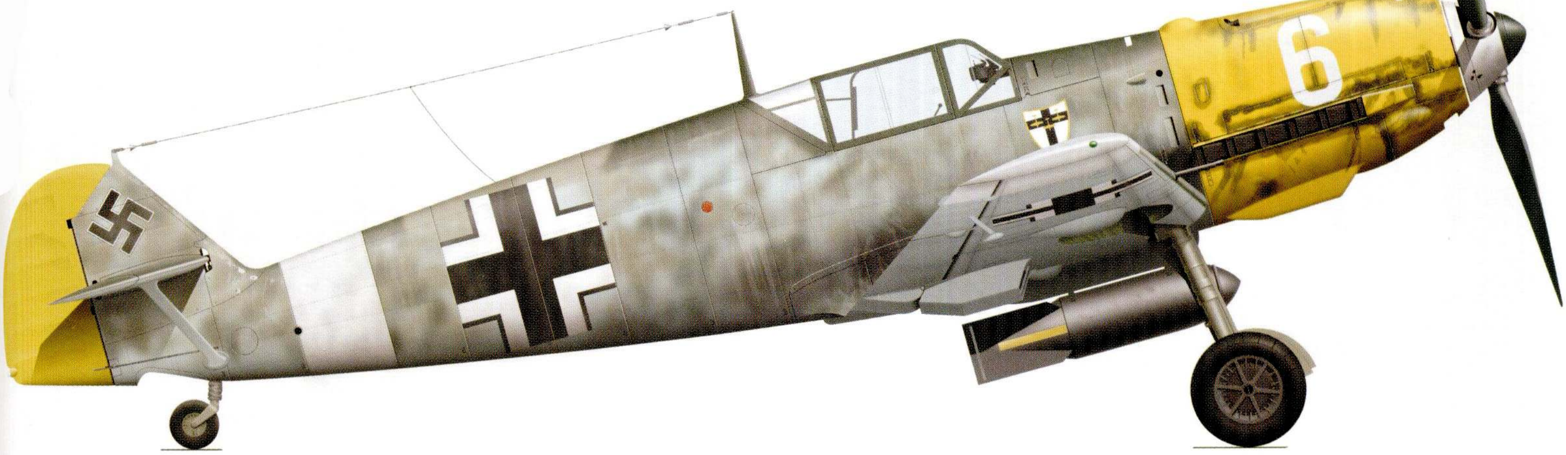
Messerschmitt Bf 109 E-1 'Brown 12' of 9./JG 77, Greece, May 1941

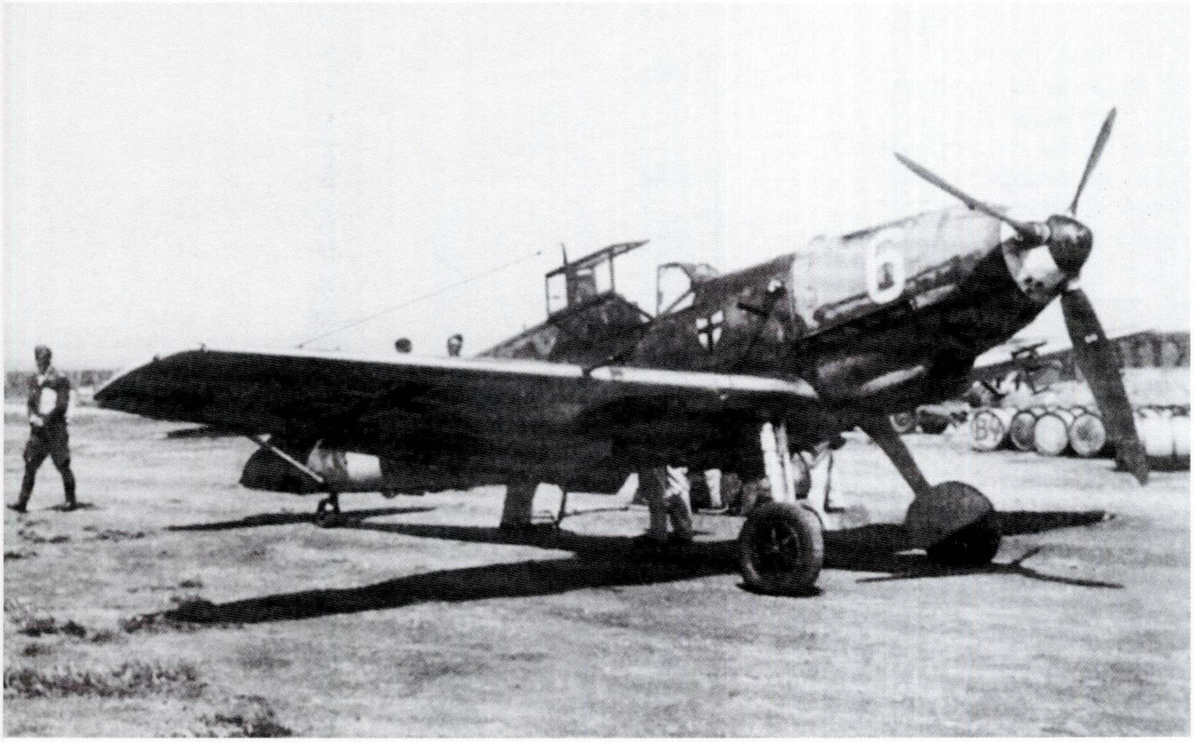
The camouflage on this aircraft consisted of a 71/02/65 scheme with a high demarcation and small 71 mottles over the fuselage. Although an E-1, the aircraft has been modified with the later, squared canopy, curved head armour and capped spinner.

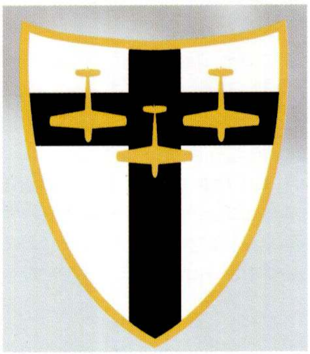


Messerchmitt Bf 109 E 'White 6' of III./JG 27, Gela, Sicily

In accordance with Luftwaffe policy regarding theatre or campaign colours, this Bf 109, either an E-4/B or the externally indistinguishable E-7, carried a white fuselage band and wingtips to indicate service in the Mediterranean theatre. The camouflage consisted of a 71/02/65 scheme which seemed to have withstood the effects of weathering considerably better than the spinner and yellow engine cowling which had become progressively more oil-stained and worn.

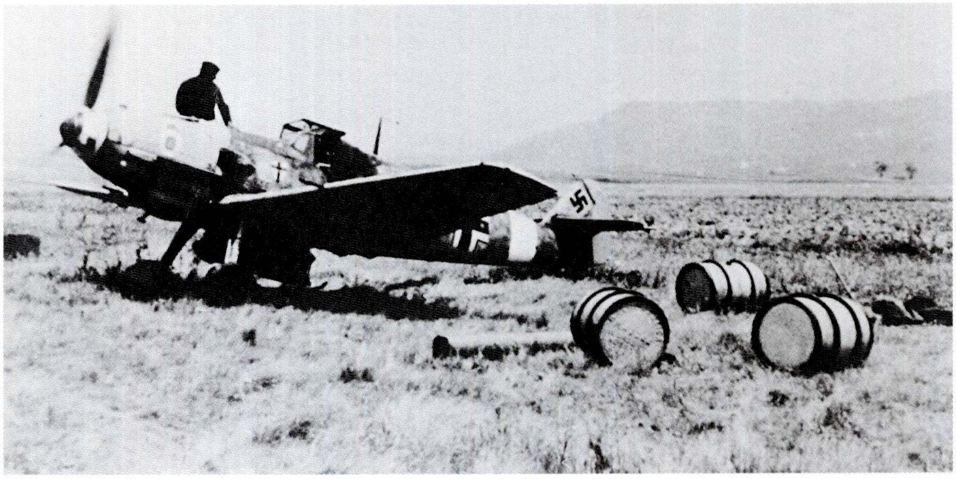


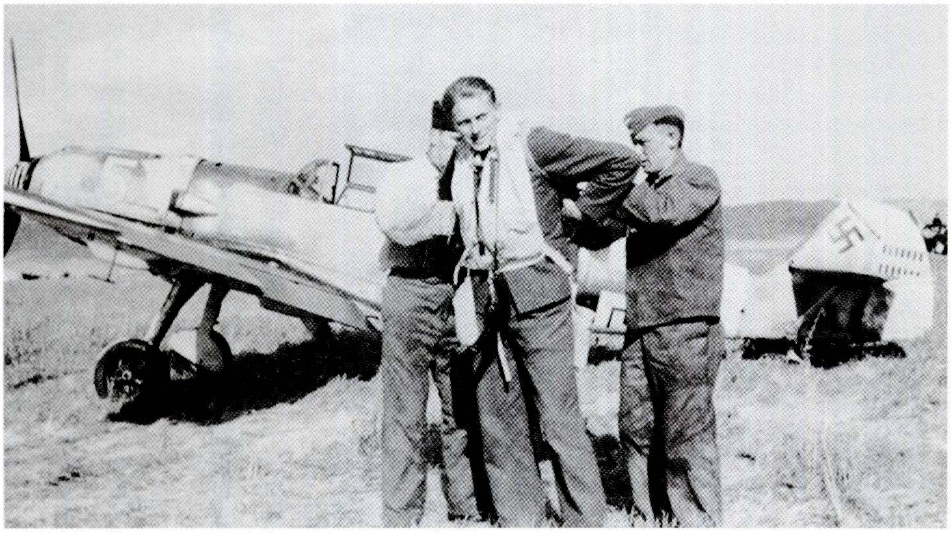




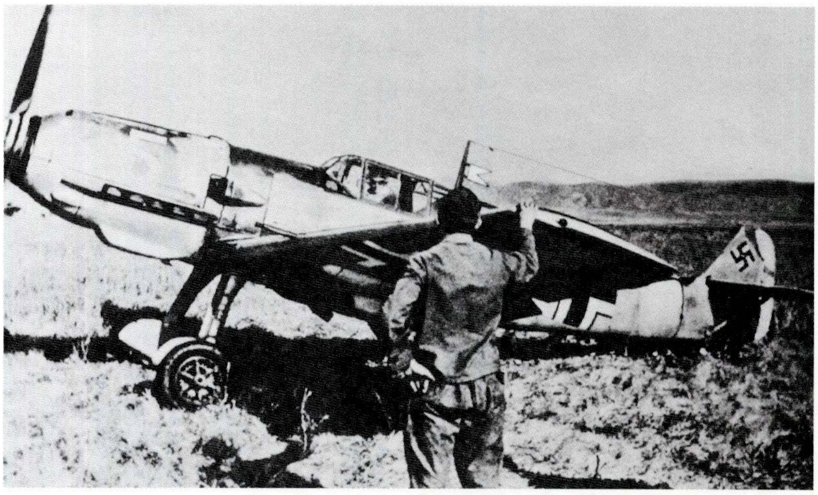
III./JG 27 emblem

ABOVE AND RIGHT: Immediately after taking part in the fighting in Yugoslavia and Greece, III./JG 27 moved first to Russia and then to Gela in Sicily where, between the 3rd and 24 May the Gruppe operated over Malta and did not therefore take part in the softening-up operations flown against Crete nor the invasion of the island which was launched on 20 May. Although Crete was not finally captured until 31 May, III./JG 27 did not return to the Balkans but subsequently moved on to North Africa where its activities will be covered in detail in a further section of this series. Nevertheless, these photographs, taken in Sicily while the battle for Crete was still in progress, show the rapidity with which aircraft had their earlier yellow fuselage bands removed or painted out and a wider, white band applied around the rear fuselage as a tactical marking for aircraft operating in Sicily and North Africa. As was customary in III./JG 27, this Bf 109 E, 'White 6', carries its identification numbers on its engine cowling, a practice inherited from the Gruppe's predecessor, I./JG 1.



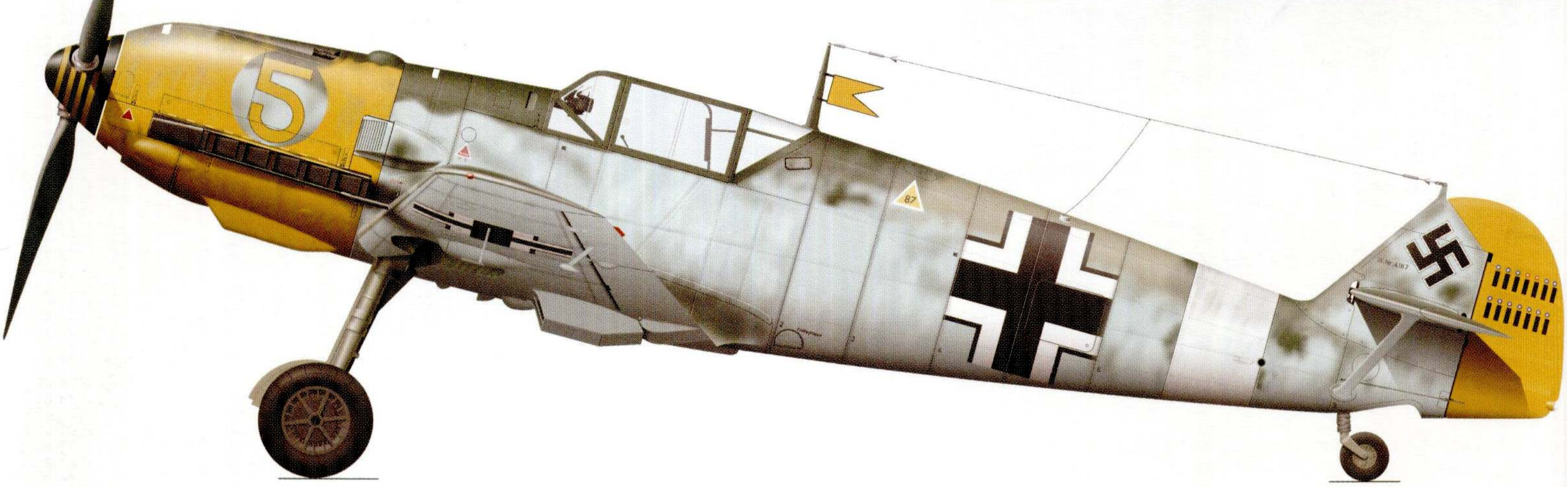


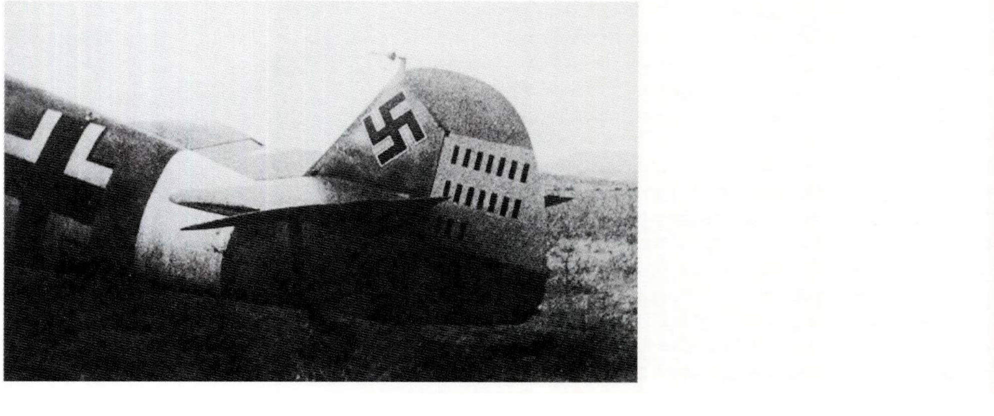
Oblt. Erbo Graf von Kageneck (*LEFT*), Staffelkapitän of 9./JG 27, preparing for a sortie. In the photograph of von Kageneck's 'Yellow 5', W.Nr. 4187 (*BELOW*) it may be seen that this aircraft had the Staffelkapitän's metal pennant attached to the radio mast. This series of photographs was taken while the Staffel was based at Gela in Sicily for operations against Malta. At this time, a white band had been added to the rear fuselage and the rudder carried 14 victory bars representing von Kageneck's four victories in France, nine during the Battle of Britain and the latest achieved over Malta on 6 May 1941.



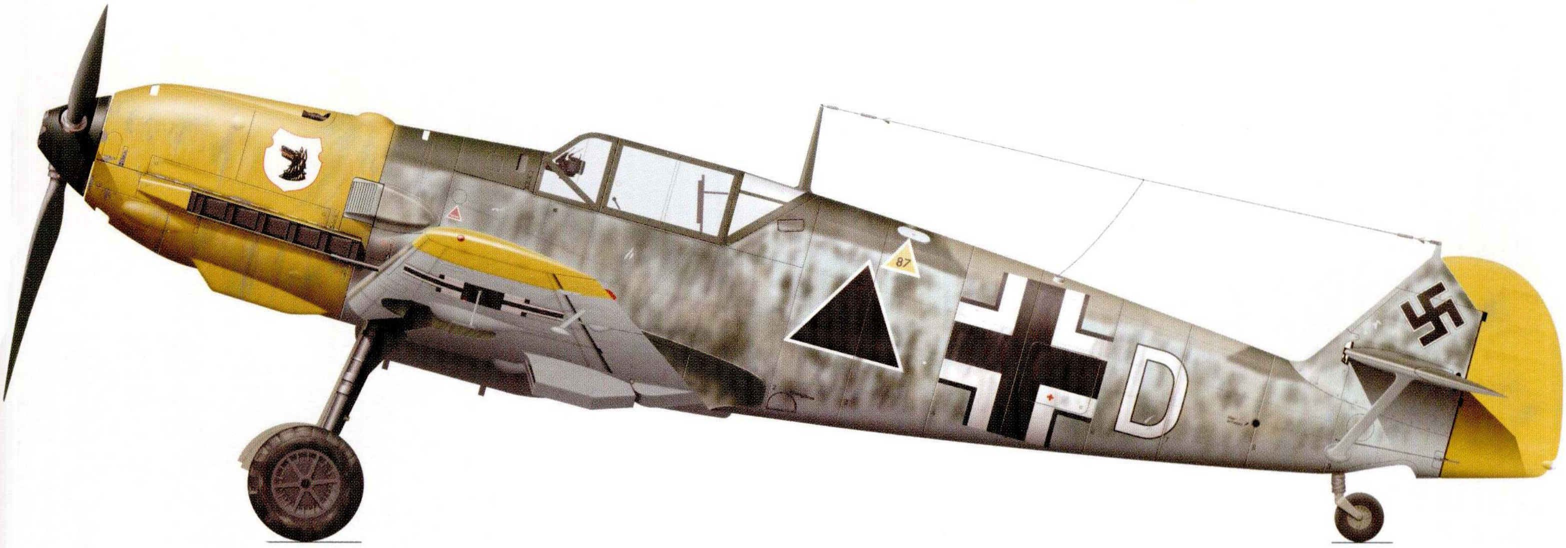
Messerschmitt Bf 109 E-7, W.Nr. 4187, flown by Oblt. Erbo Graf von Kageneck, Kapitän of 9./JG 27

This aircraft was finished in a 71/02/65 scheme and although most of the nose was painted yellow, this has worn off on the top of the cowling to expose the original camouflage colours. The yellow rudder is marked with 14 black victory bars, the first three representing French aircraft and the rest RAF aircraft.

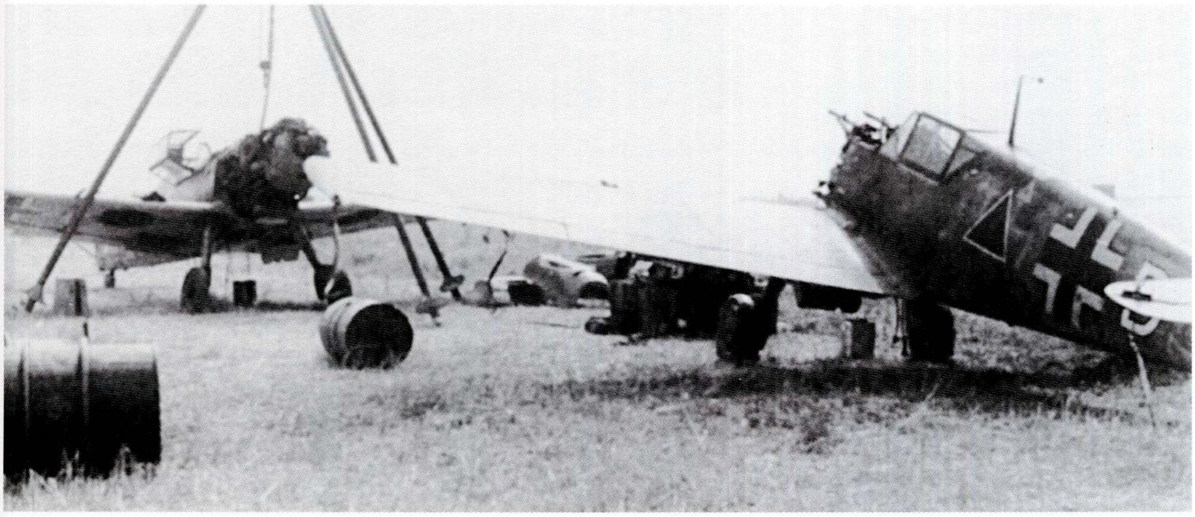




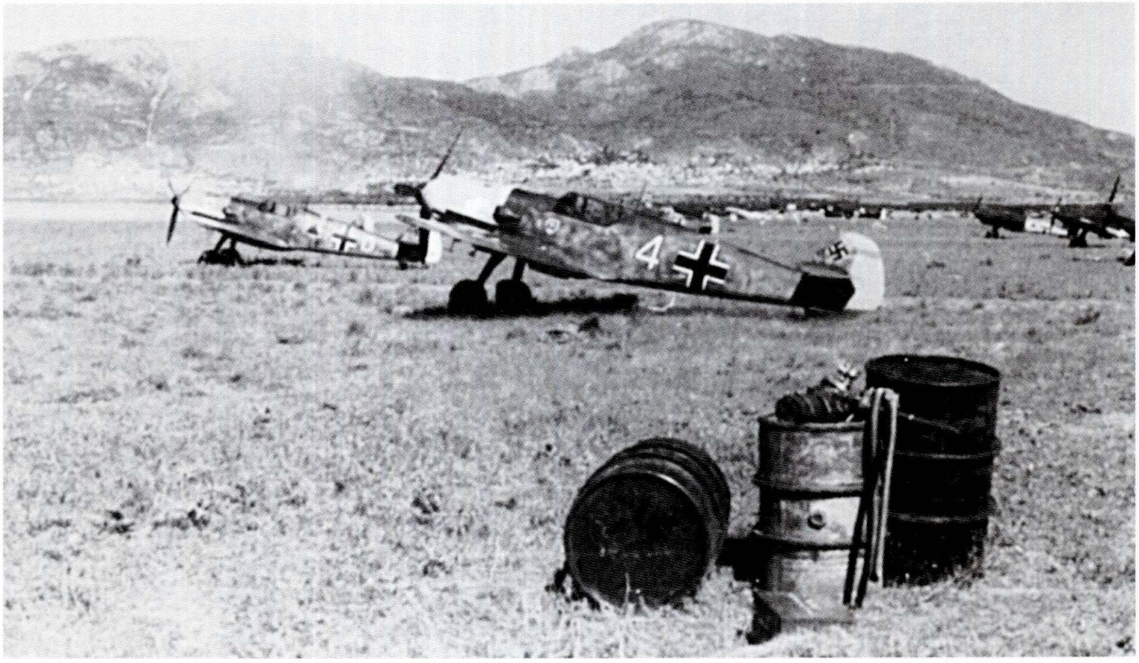
RIGHT: Later, on the 13th, 14th and 20 May, von Kageneck claimed three more victories over Malta, all Hurricanes, bringing his total number of victories to 17, as shown. Von Kageneck later fought in the Russian campaign and claimed another 48 victories, earning the Ritterkreuz and the Oak Leaves. Following his Staffel's transfer to Libya, he claimed two more victories bringing his total to 67 but was critically wounded in an engagement with a Hurricane on 24 December 1941. He died in an Italian hospital in Naples on 12 January 1942 after his wounds became infected and he developed blood poisoning.



Messerschmitt Bf 109 E-7 of III./JG 77, Molaoi, mid-May 1941
Still retaining the markings of II.(S)/LG 2, this aircraft was flown by III./JG 77. In common with a number of other aircraft observed in the Balkans, it has been fitted with flat head armour, cannon and a bomb rack but still has an early, uncapped spinner. The camouflage consisted of a 71/02/65 finish with the fuselage sides quite heavily mottled. Note that the cover to the fuel cap above the octane triangle on the fuselage is natural metal.



ABOVE AND RIGHT: Photographed at Molaoi, mid-May 1941, these aircraft (*ABOVE*) were previously flown by II.(S)/LG 2 but have been taken over by III./JG 77 and are shown here having their engines changed. The aircraft closest to the camera is 'White D'. (*RIGHT*) A further photograph showing 'White D' in the background with, in the foreground, 'White 4', previously on the strength of 1./JG 2 and which has again been taken over by III./JG 77.



Preparing for ‘Merkur’

On 4 May, Adolf Hitler made a speech in the *Reichstag* in which he celebrated the “great victory in Greece” but seemed in no particular hurry to follow up on his success by launching an attack against the island of Crete, to which Greek and Allied soldiers had withdrawn during their evacuation of the mainland. Six days later, the Deputy *Führer*, Rudolf Hess, flew to Scotland on a mysterious mission, about which even 60 years later only little is known. Did Hitler hope, perhaps, that Great Britain, having suffered another Dunkirk, would now sue for peace?

Meanwhile, preparations for other military operations were under way. On 11 May, II./JG 27 left the Athens area, its aircraft flying from Eleusis to Salonika and thence on to Wien-Schwechat where they would be serviced and overhauled for the next campaign: the invasion of Russia. The *Stab* and the two *Gruppen* of JG 77, with I.(*J*)/LG 2, were the only fighter units left in the Balkans. Because of their limited range, the fighters of these units moved southwards to the primitive airfield of Molaoi in the Peloponnese. According to some accounts, it is believed that, instead of following their unit, the ground personnel of I.(*J*)/LG 2 were loaded onto lorries and moved back to Belgrade, and then on to Rumania, leaving all technical requirements to the ground staff of JG 77 and the Stuka units stationed at Molaoi. On 11 May, having appropriated aircraft from every conceivable source, the seven *Staffeln* of JG 77 were able to line up 61 Bf 109 Es.

ABOVE: Troops of the British Expeditionary Force after being evacuated from Greece. More than fifty thousand British and Imperial soldiers were successfully evacuated from Greece, about 80% of the number originally sent to that country. The majority were transported back to Egypt, but 16,000 were left to form the garrison for Crete which, it was decided, had to be held at all costs.

After the evacuation of Greece, the strategically important Mediterranean island of Crete held about 32,000 British and Commonwealth troops and about 10,000 Greek infantry, though there was little artillery or transport and the Allied forces possessed just nine tanks and 35 aircraft. Although the Germans had complete air superiority, they lacked naval control of the area and it was now decided that the island would be captured by airborne assault. The date initially set was 17 May, but as material and men of the airborne forces had to be assembled from all over Europe, *‘Merkur’* had to be postponed until 20 May. In the meantime, in order to protect the fleets of transport aircraft which would take part in the airborne assault, the *Luftwaffe* had to ensure that aerial supremacy was maintained.

On 14 May, the fighters were ready to operate against Crete. With great clouds of dust rising up in the slipstreams of their powerful engines, all serviceable machines of JG 77 and I.(*J*)/LG 2 took off and headed out over the Aegean bound for Crete. II. and III./JG 77 concentrated their forces against Maleme airfield which for some days had been under observation by high-flying reconnaissance aircraft. II./JG 77 claimed one victory and III./JG 77 three, but in fact both units attacked the same British aircraft as only two Hurricanes were lost in this area. The Bf 109s then strafed the airfields, destroying a Hurricane, a Fulmar and three Buffaloes. *Gefr.* Hans Gabler of 6./JG 77 was killed, either a victim of fighters or the airfield’s anti-aircraft defences and *Uffz.* Willi Hagel of 4./JG 77 nursed his crippled aircraft back to Molaoi but crashed fatally while trying to land. Other military targets on the island were attacked by I.(*J*)/LG 2, although the pilots found it difficult to locate anything worth while as Allied aircraft were so scarce and troop positions were well concealed in the Cretan landscape. In the evening, III./JG 77 again strafed Maleme airfield but the aircraft flown by *Lt.* Diethelm von Eichel-Streiber was severely hit by anti-aircraft fire which all but destroyed the tail of his aircraft. Von Eichel-Streiber was attached to the *Stab* of his uncle, *Hptm.* Alexander von Winterfeldt and, concerned about the flight over 160 km of sea in a badly damaged aircraft, radioed his uncle and requested advice. In reply, he received the surprising answer: “My

BELOW: Only two Junkers G 38s were built, the first of which crashed in 1936. The second aircraft, a G 38ce named ‘Marschall von Hindenburg’, flew pre-war with Lufthansa until impressed into service with the Luftwaffe where it was operated by KGzbvV 172 in Norway. Later, this machine flew some missions to Greece but it was destroyed on 17 May 1941 during an RAF bombing attack on Athens-Tatoi airfield.

good nephew, when you are in troubles and cannot do anything else, you must slowly recite the Lord's Prayer". Whether or not he was granted the required divine intervention is not known, but *Lt.* von Eichel-Streiber, a future Knight's Cross holder, crash-landed safely at Molaoi.

In the days which followed, the three *Gruppen* of JG 77 continued their ground strafing of airfields, III./JG 77 being particularly active on the 16th when *Ofw.* Herbert Höhne (the future *Ofw.* Kaiser) claimed his fifth *Abschuss*, and another future *Ritterkreuzträger*, *Uffz.* Johann Pichler, was credited with his first official[8] victory. Their opponents were the Sea Hurricanes of the Fleet Air Arm's 805 Squadron, two of which were shot down and the pilots killed. Another British pilot, Lt. Ramsay, shot down two aircraft of 8./JG 77; *Lt.* Harald Mann baled out and was captured, wounded, and taken to hospital, while the other of Ramsay's victims, *Ofw.* Herbert Perrey, made an emergency landing. Although Perrey was captured unhurt, he was assaulted by Commonwealth soldiers, one of whom demanded Perrey's ring. When he refused, the soldier struck Perrey's head with a knife, so that he, too, was sent to hospital where he found himself in the same ward as *Lt.* Mann.

Two victories were claimed by I.(*J*)/LG 2's *Lt.* Friedrich Geisshardt while escorting Ju 87s to attack shipping in Suda Bay, and the same unit's *Ofhr.* Günther Hannak claimed his first *Abschuss*. Both

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[8] Born in 1912, Pichler had earlier been a driver in the Luftwaffe but despite his age he volunteered to become a pilot and joined 7./JG 77 in 1939. On 18 February 1941, while stationed in France, Pichler assisted in the destruction of a Ju 88 which, although Pichler reported was in Luftwaffe markings, he was nevertheless ordered to shoot down as higher authority mistakenly believed it was a Blenheim.

"The missions to Crete put a great strain on our nerves..."

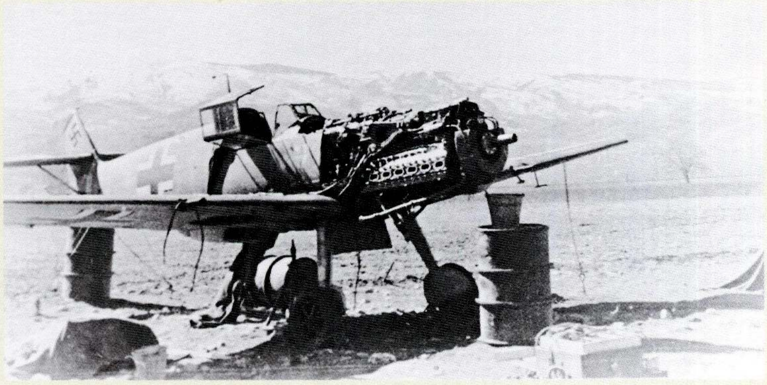
JOHANN PICHLER, 7./JG 77

It was extraordinarily hot on Molaoi, the airfield at the southern end of the Peloponnese, and the ground crews especially were under great stress. The fine dust deposited on the engines and airframes resulted in supercharger damage and the fuel booster pumps became clogged. The consumption of lubricating oil was unusually high and, since the oil temperature was 95 to 100°C, oil changes were frequently required. With temperatures of up to 40°C, the ground crews naturally preferred to work naked to the waist but the *Fliegerführer*, von Richthofen, demanded that the men wear their black working clothes. In the *Gruppe's* opinion, this was a foolish order, so we posted an additional lookout who was to watch for any approaching Fieseler *Storch* staff aircraft. When one was spotted approaching the airfield, the lookout raised an alarm and the ground crews quickly got dressed again in their black working clothes.

The operational missions to Crete put a great strain on our nerves and before taking off we could only pray that our engines would not give trouble. The outward trip over the sea was 160 km, and then we had to make the return flight, sometimes with damaged engines, and our greatest thought was, "I only hope I don't get engine trouble". Over the sea we had to endure the terrible heat in our cockpits and I never saw any ships which might have saved our lives had we been forced to come down in the sea.

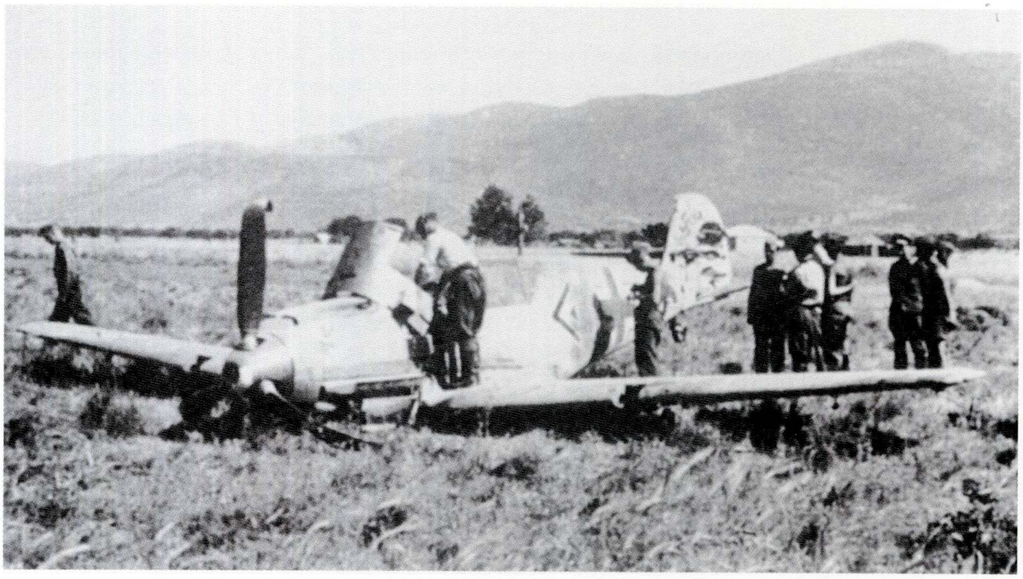
On 19 May, *Oblt.* Huy led a *Schwarm* from 7. *Staffel* for a strike against positions on Maleme airfield, on Crete. I was one of the pilots. We took off early in the morning while it was still dark and foggy. It was an impressive flight, high over layers of haze and mist which prevented us from seeing the water. Our orders were to carry out low-level attacks against the British anti-aircraft positions at Maleme. As we dived down from 4,000 metres, the British anti-aircraft guns opened up, their red tracers coming up at us in a withering wall of fire. At the same time, the white tracers from our cannon and machine-guns flew downwards until our shells disappeared into the British positions. We were lucky to return without being seriously hit, but despite the large number of operations carried out, we were unable to destroy the AA defences with cannon or bombs because the positions were perfectly built and difficult to recognise.

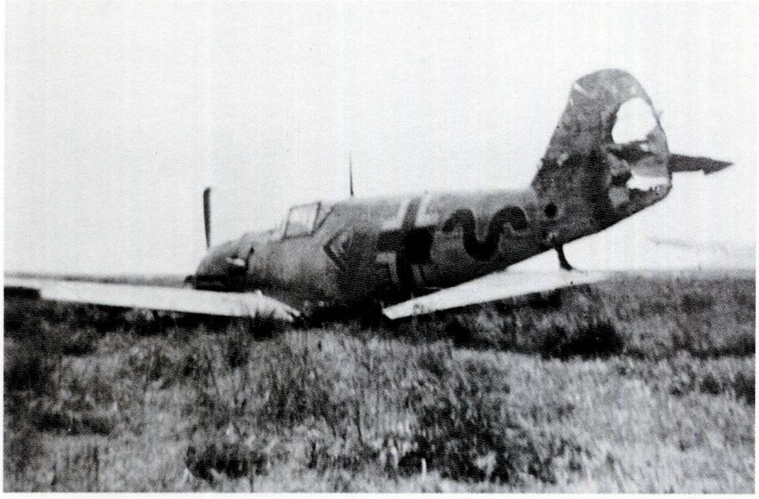
A serious drawback which become evident in our strafing operations was that the Bf 109 – with its vulnerable cooling system for the liquid-cooled DB 601 engine – was quite unsuited to low-level ground-attacks.

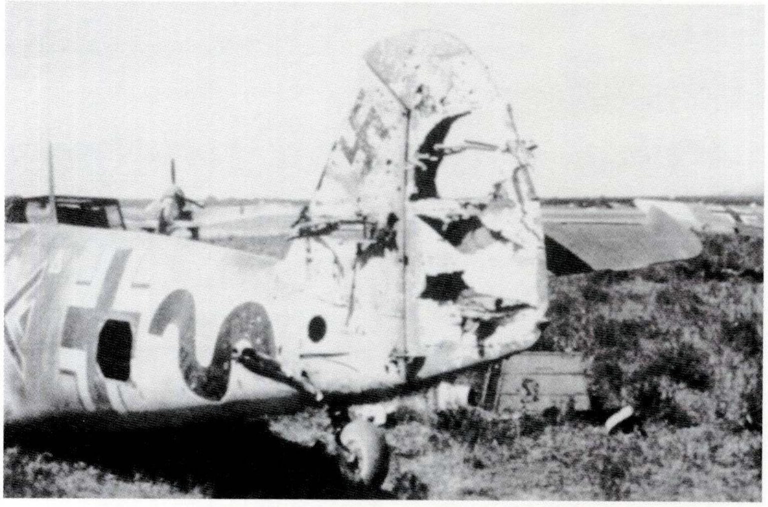


LEFT: A photograph showing the primitive conditions under which ground crews worked in the Balkans. In this instance the aircraft is a Bf 109 E-7 of 9./JG 27.

THIS PAGE: On 14 May, Lt. Diethelm von Eichel-Streiber of Stab III./JG 77 – the nephew of the Kommandeur, Hptm. Alexander von Winterfeldt – was flying this aircraft over Crete when it was hit by anti-aircraft guns which damaged the tail unit and shot away the left tailplane. After a long flight over the sea, Lt. Eichel-Streiber returned to Molaoi where he made a crash-landing. The photographs show the condition of the aircraft after its return.

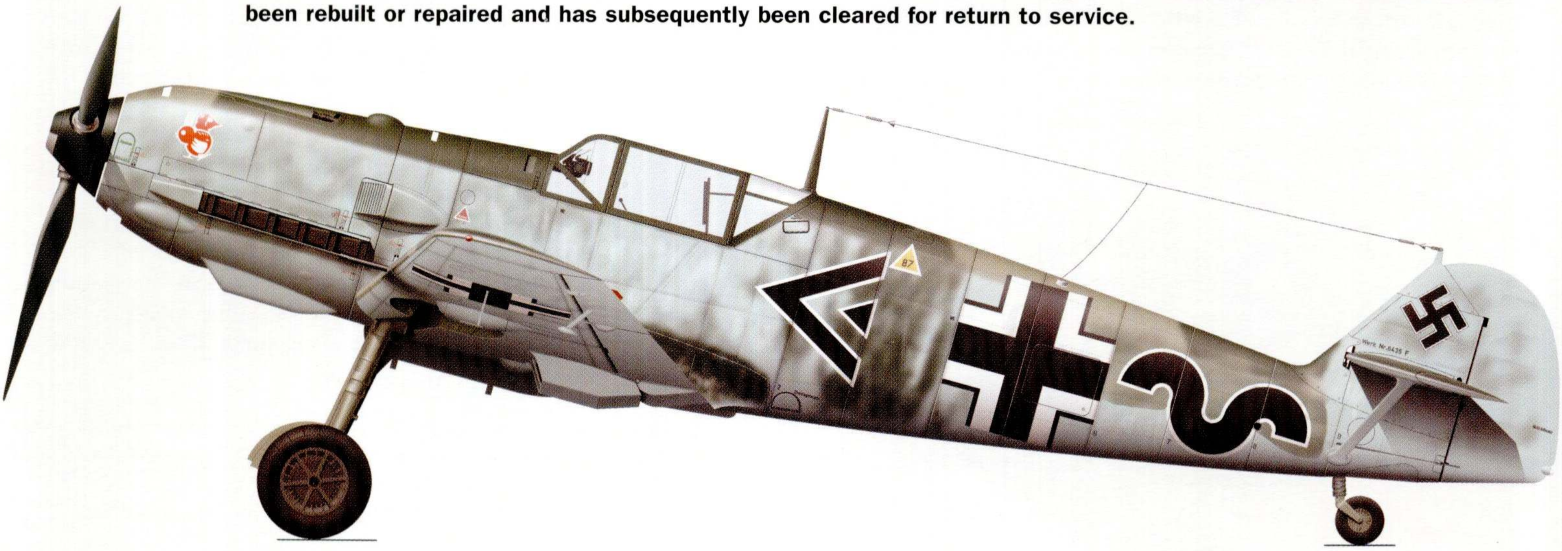






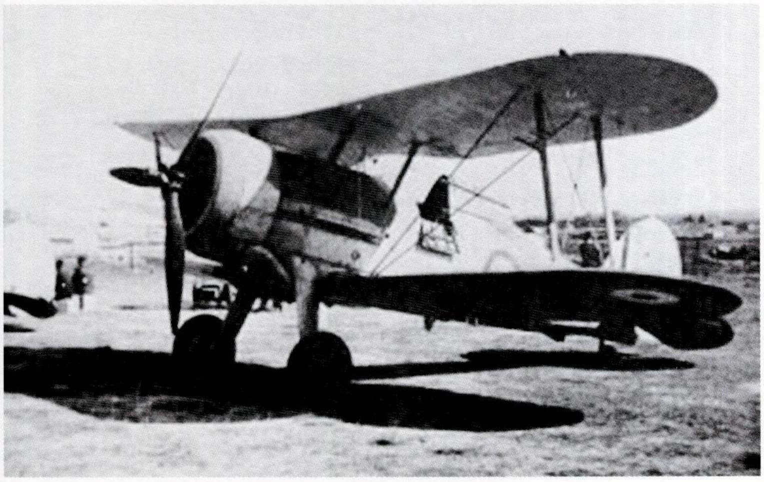
Messerschmitt Bf 109 E-7, W.Nr. 6435 F, flown by Lt. Diethelm von Eichel-Streiber of Stab III./JG 77, Molaoi, Greece, May 1941

Camouflaged in a faded 71/02/65 scheme with evidence of overspraying ahead of the fuselage Balkenkreuz, this machine is unusual for aircraft operating in the Balkans in that it lacks the extensive areas of yellow normally associated with this campaign. The spinner was green with a white segment on the nose ring and the badge of 8./JG 54 appears on the cowling. The F suffix to the W.Nr. stands for 'Flugklar' and indicates that this airframe has been rebuilt or repaired and has subsequently been cleared for return to service.



pilots would later be awarded the *Ritterkreuz*, and Hannak survived the war.[9] German aerial victories continued to be rare, though on 18 May, when JG 77 was ordered to attack Maleme airfield "until the last enemy aircraft is destroyed", *Fw.* Otto Niemeyer of 4./JG 77 claimed his sixth victory, a lone, replacement Hurricane, as it was preparing to land at Maleme. For the pilot, Sgt. Vernon Hill, who was killed, this ferry flight proved to be his first and last war flight.

If the British were allowed to hold Crete, it would form a base from which they could threaten not only the Balkans but Axis shipping taking supplies to German and Italian forces in North Africa. The island was therefore of major strategic importance and the British resolved to hold it, but British and Commonwealth losses in Greece had been heavy and reinforcements were few. On the evening of 18 May, having learned that the German airborne assault was imminent, the commander on Crete, Major-General Freyberg VC, agreed that the RAF's last four Hurricanes and a Gladiator - no match against the might of the *Luftwaffe* - should be withdrawn to Egypt.



LEFT AND ABOVE: On 18 May, the Officer Commanding the RAF on Crete and Major-General Freyberg decided to send out the remaining serviceable aircraft since they could do nothing effective against the scale of the German attack. At dawn on the 19th, three Hurricanes (*ABOVE*) and four Gladiators (*LEFT*) flew out to Egypt, followed that evening by the RAF's last four Hurricanes and a Gladiator.

'Merkur'; 20 May 1941

> **"Almost simultaneously with the awareness of a heavy droning in the distance, I noticed one of our number frantically pointing out to sea, and agitatedly drawing our attention to something which at first I could not discern.**
>
> **Automatically, the sound of droning engines caused me to look toward the unfriendly skies, but I quickly noted that my comrade's finger was not indicating anything skywards, but rather something towards the horizon. What I saw was probably unprecedented in any previous operation of war.**
>
> **I saw them crawling like noisome giants towards us, their undercarriages appearing almost to be sweeping the placid sea. They were coming in waves, and the blackness of them added the sinister to the fantastic. They were easily the largest planes that we had ever seen."**
>
> Account by Arnold Richard Ashworth, with the British Army on Crete, on first observing the airborne invasion fleet.

In the early morning of 20 May 1941, fleets of Ju 52/3ms took off from the Greek mainland. Most were loaded with paratroops, though some machines also towed gliders carrying equipment or more troops whose objectives were to capture Maleme airport, the town of Canea and Suda port. In a planned second wave of attacks later in the day, the German forces intended to capture the towns and airports of Rethymnon and Heraklion, the key to success being the swift capture of at least one airport so that reinforcements could be flown in. But these objectives and the paratroops' dropping zones were well known to Major-General Freyberg, who had again received information based on ULTRA decrypts informing him of the German plans for the first phases of '*Merkur*'. So it was that the *Fallschirmjäger* landed on strong points which, although hurriedly prepared, were well camouflaged and viciously efficient. Despite attempts by Bf 110s and Bf 109s which strafed the positions to disrupt enemy defences, hundreds of paratroops were killed while still hanging in their parachutes or within seconds of landing.

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[9] In May 1943, at which time Hannak was leading 7./JG 27, he was shot down over Malta and captured, a fact which he attributes to his survival. Although the previously mentioned Johann Pichler was captured by Russian forces while recovering from wounds in a hospital in Rumania in 1944, he, like Hannak, believed that, had he not been captured, he would certainly have been killed in action, such was the loss rate among German fighter pilots in the latter stages of the war.

Surprisingly, since they knew of the German plans and outnumbered the attackers by over four to one, the defenders did not succeed in destroying the airborne troops. Around Maleme, the situation quickly became confused and the New Zealanders were hindered in co-ordinating their defences by the incessant air attacks, a lack of vehicles and inadequate communications equipment. Additionally, Freyberg had been warned to expect a *seaborne* landing in support of the air drop and concentrated a major part of his forces on the coast. There were also failures on the part of the New Zealand commanders to counter-attack at a time when the airborne forces were still in difficulty.

On the first day of the invasion, II./JG 77 was ordered to carry out low-level attacks against anti-aircraft positions and lost four pilots to ground fire. *Fw.* Otto Niemeyer [10] of 4./JG 77 was reported to have evaded capture, but he failed to return to his unit and some reports state he was missing in action. 5./JG 77 lost three pilots including the *Staffelkapitän*, *Oblt.* Berthold Jung.[11] Jung was captured, together with *Oblt.* Gerhard Rahm and *Ofw.* Werner Petermann, a veteran with nine victories. All three PoWs were unhurt and were quickly evacuated by sea to Egypt, ending the war in New Zealand and returning to Germany afterwards. Their loss was a serious shock to II./JG 77 as all three pilots had been with the *Gruppe* since before the war and had gained considerable combat experience, notably against the RAF. Another pilot shot down that day was *Fw.* Dietrich Saake, a relative newcomer to III./JG 77. He too was a victim of the anti-aircraft guns and, after capture, was also evacuated to Africa.

By the morning of 21 May, the paratroops had suffered massive losses but still had not captured an airfield. The decision was then taken to focus on Maleme airfield alone and in the afternoon, Ju 52/3ms loaded with *Gebirgsjäger* began landing, regardless of the machine-gun and artillery fire which swept the airfield. As many as one in three of the Ju 52/3ms was lost as a result of enemy fire, bad landings or collisions amid the dust and confusion on the cratered airfield. As more and more transports landed, crashed aircraft were cleared from the single runway with the aid of a captured British tank and soon the sides of the airfield became a giant graveyard containing the wrecks of 80 Ju 52/3ms. This change in tactics allowed the Germans to secure Maleme airfield and fly in further reinforcements and heavier weapons.

> **We marched and groaned beneath our load, while Jerry bombed us off the road.**
> **He chased us here he chased us there, the bastards chased us everywhere.**
> **And while we cursed his load of death, we cursed the bloody RAF.**
> **Yet the RAF was there in force, though they left a few at home of course.**
> **We saw the entire force one day, when a Hurricane hurried the other way!**
>
> *Excerpt from 'Hitler's Isle of Doom', author unknown.*

Over Crete

As it had already become apparent that there was going to be little or no opposition from the RAF, all VIII. *Fliegerkorps'* single and twin-engined fighters were made available for use as fighter-bombers and on 23 May, III./ JG 77 carried out ground-attack operations over Crete, mainly in *Schwärme* or *Rotten* strength, to provide valuable support for the airborne troops fighting in the Maleme area. German fighters also intercepted the occasional raids by British bombers flying in from North Africa to bomb the airfields and airborne troops' positions on Crete and on the same day *Ofhr.* Günther Hannak of I.(*J*)/LG 2 claimed his second and third *Luftsiege* when he shot down two Blenheims.

Although losses among the transport aircraft were considerable, the storming of Maleme airfield proved decisive and allowed German forces to break out and capture almost all of western Crete. On 25 May, after five days of fighting, 5./JG 77 sent a small detachment to Maleme. On the way, the formation intercepted three British Blenheims of 14 Sqn. over Suda Bay, the most important harbour of the island. All three were shot down, two being credited to *Uffz.* Rudolf Schmidt, a future *Ritterkreuzträger* who was

Continued on page 80

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[10] Niemeyer had been credited with the destruction of two Wellingtons during the so-called "Battle of the German Bight" in December 1939.

[11] Jung was also credited with a Wellington on 18 December 1939.

ULTRA and 'Merkur'

When XI. *Fliegerkorps* began to prepare for the operation against Crete, the Ju 52/3ms of the ten transport *Gruppen* due to take part were left on ordinary transport operations until the last possible moment, and only then were they modified for parachute and glider towing. Such security measures were designed to ensure that German plans remained secret, but British Intelligence was already well aware of German intentions concerning Crete in considerable detail. Their source was ULTRA, the British security classification for the intelligence produced by the interception and decryption of wireless traffic encrypted by the German cipher machine Enigma.

In the last week of March 1941, ULTRA began to reveal signs of movements by units of XI. *Fliegerkorps*, the *Luftwaffe's* parachute arm commanded by *General* Kurt Student. There were also short ULTRA decrypts ordering moves by certain personnel who, from previous ULTRA messages, were known to British Intelligence to be officers or men belonging to units of XI. *Fliegerkorps*. Clearly, something was in the wind which involved a parachute operation, the first since the invasion of the Low Countries a year earlier. Another source was railway Enigma [1] which in late April revealed reinforcements moving to the south-east, but for what purpose was as yet unknown. Then, on 26 April, the first direct reference to Crete was intercepted when the principal *Luftwaffe* HQ in the Balkans, *Luftflotte* 4, asked for maps and photographs of the island.

Major-General Bernard Freyberg, the New Zealand officer commanding Allied forces in Crete, arrived from Greece on 29 April and was appointed GOC-in-C the same day. The growing probability that the Germans intended to attack Crete had first become a virtual certainty when an ULTRA decrypt revealed that the *Luftwaffe* had been ordered to take care not to destroy the island's airfields and to conduct detailed aerial photography. On 6 May, the British decrypted the complete operational orders for the forthcoming assault which also revealed that the Germans were expecting to be ready by 17 May.

On 12 May, a copy of the German plan was flown out to Freyberg but, for security reasons, the Air Intelligence Section at Bletchley Park disguised the ULTRA intelligence as a résumé of German intentions compiled from documents obtained through Secret Service channels from General Headquarters in Athens. This résumé reported, among other things, that on the first day of the attack, the airfields at Maleme, Rethymnon and Heraklion would be the main targets of parachute landings, that about 100 dive-bombers and fighter aircraft would then move in, and that a seaborne contingent would arrive with anti-aircraft batteries, motor-cyclists and anti-tank units. The size of the force - between 30,000 and 35,000 men including paratroops - was also revealed, and the air support was estimated at 150 long-range bombers and 100 heavy fighters. Further decrypts followed, and by the 16th, the full scale of the attack had been revealed with considerable accuracy.

Born in 1889, Bernard Cyril Freyberg fought in the First World War, during which he was wounded nine times and awarded the Victoria Cross and three DSOs. During the Second World War, he commanded the New Zealand 2nd Division in North Africa before going to Greece. With the fall of Greece, Major-General Freyberg was evacuated to Crete and was in command of the troops there during the German attack.

Naturally, Churchill was anxious to ensure that, as it was known precisely when and where the gliders and paratroops were going to land, concealed troops and guns should be made ready to ambush them. Freyberg used the intelligence information to strengthen his positions as best he could and by the 16th he reported to General Wavell that plans for the defence of Crete had been completed, that all defences had been strengthened and that he believed the island could be held. But on the 20th, when the attack began a few days later than originally planned, Freyberg was soon in trouble and signalled that his forces were hard pressed, that his ability to hold key objectives was marginal, and that the scale of air attack, which had disrupted his communications, had been severe.[2]

The battle for possession of Crete was precarious for both sides and although the Germans only managed to capture Maleme airfield with significant losses, they were then able to reinforce by air. By 28 May, Freyberg decided that the island could no longer be held and the evacuation of Allied troops began. Some 3,600 British and Commonwealth troops were killed, about 12,000 taken prisoner, and the Royal Navy also suffered heavy losses in men and ships. German losses were 6,000 killed and wounded, and Hitler was so appalled at the slaughter of the elite parachute troops that he forbade any further major airborne operations.

In conclusion, it should be mentioned that there is an alternative version of events regarding ULTRA and Freyberg. The British obviously had to take steps to avoid arousing enemy suspicion that their ciphers were being read and strict secrecy was imposed on the distribution of ULTRA intelligence, as a result of which it is believed Freyberg received only the résumé mentioned above. However, according to some key members of the ULTRA team, Freyberg *was* informed of the ULTRA secret apparently regardless of the obvious risk that he might reveal the secret if captured. This version is in fact supported by Freyberg's son, to whom his father related - many years after the event, and at a time when he felt his life was ending - that although the ULTRA intelligence he received showed his defences were all wrong, the risk of jeopardising the secret was so great, that he was ordered not to redeploy his forces.

Whatever the truth of this, for the first time in the war, Bletchley Park felt very strongly that, having provided all the information required to destroy the German attack, its product had not been properly used. From the British viewpoint, perhaps the best that can be said is that although it did not prevent the eventual loss of the island, ULTRA intelligence did at least help to make the invasion a disastrously costly operation for the Germans.

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1. Users of the Enigma enciphering machine included the German Army, Navy, Air Force, Secret Service, Police, SS and the *Reichsbahn*, the German railway.

2. In recent years, the conduct of Freyberg and several of his senior officers on Crete has been examined and criticised for various tactical errors made in response to the invasion, including failure to counter-attack at Maleme and for pulling back to defensive positions too soon.

The Attack on Crete

Following the campaign in Greece, the strategic importance of Crete was soon obvious to the German High Command and as early as 23 April 1941, the planning and execution of a large airborne operation against the island was entrusted to XI. *Fliegerkorps* under *General* Student. The forces already in the area, some of which had already taken part in the attack on Corinth, were reinforced by further parachute units located at their home bases in Germany.

Ten transport *Gruppen*, two of them equipped for glider-towing, were allocated to XI. *Fliegerkorps* and two train loads of DFS 230 gliders were brought up to the area by rail. However, great difficulty was experienced with the transport of all supplies due to the destruction of rail communications during the war in Yugoslavia. Furthermore, the airfields near Athens, which had to accommodate the ten transport *Gruppen*, were exceedingly dusty and lacked refuelling facilities, factors which would later have a significant effect on the conduct of the operation. All preparations were complete by 19 May.

The operation called for an attack in two waves the next day, one in the morning to capture Maleme airport and the town of Canea, and another in the afternoon to take the towns and airports of Rethymnon and Heraklion. The key to success lay in the swift capture of the airfields at Maleme and Retimno so that supplies, ammunition and reinforcements could be airlifted in.

The attack on Crete began at first light on 20 May when 53 DFS 230 gliders were towed off from Tanagra to land troops near Canea and Rethimnon. Within 15 minutes of the glider landings, the first wave of Ju 52/3ms arrived and dropped their parachute troops. Only seven Ju 52/3ms were lost in this phase of the operation and in Athens, XI. *Fliegerkorps*, lacking any communication with the airborne forces on Crete because their radios had been damaged on landing, thought the operation was proceeding well. In fact, the British, New Zealand, Australian and Greek troops on the island had been expecting the invasion and the paratroops dropped straight onto strong defences and suffered extremely heavy casualties.

Returning to Greece to refuel and fly in the second wave of troops to Rethymnon and Heraklion, most Ju 52/3ms found their airfields blanketed in thick dust thrown up by the machines which had landed before them. Some aircraft had to circle for up to two hours before they could land and then refuelling the aircraft by hand from barrels caused further delays. Unfortunately, VIII. *Fliegerkorps'* aerial bombardment of the defences had proceeded according to the original timetable, so that when the second wave took off, overdue and badly scattered, the island's defences had largely recovered and the paratroops encountered savage enemy fire and suffered many casualties. Nevertheless, by the end of the first day, the airborne forces, of which it is estimated some 7,000 were put down, had made some advances, but at huge cost, and there was still no airfield in German hands.

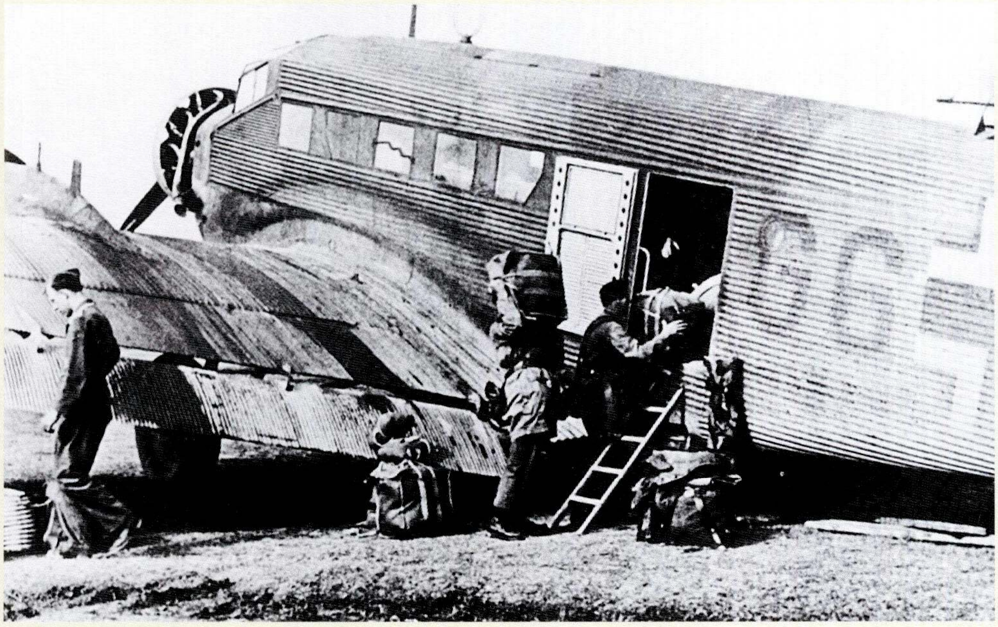
The next day, *General* Student decided that although Maleme was still in Allied hands and regardless of the cost in aircraft, he would land the 100th Mountain Regiment and other units of the 4th Mountain Division which should have arrived the previous day. Although Maleme was still not entirely in German hands until 23 May and the airfield was under constant fire, the Ju 52/3ms landed and took off again as quickly as possible. An Australian artillery colonel observing the aircraft through binoculars said that it took 70 seconds for each transport to land and offload its men and equipment. This steady shuttle helped to turn the day in Germany's favour at a time when troops and heavy weapons scheduled to arrive by sea had almost all failed to arrive due to the actions of the Royal Navy.

Supply dropping was undertaken from 21 May and heavy artillery pieces, which had to be dismantled before they could be loaded, were also airlifted in. The transport units were hard pressed, air-lifting ammunition, troops, food and drinking water, for which there was a constant demand and a large supply had to be organised. At the same time, wounded were flown out, sometimes to Athens, often to Bucharest, by aircraft going there to fetch ammunition and other stores. It is estimated that some 400 Ju 52/3ms were involved in the first lift, but after the first day's operations, serviceability dropped to between 50 and 60% of strength as a consequence of the heavy damage by intense Allied gunfire, collisions, crash-landings and landings on beaches or rough ground. Soon, other transport aircraft had to be brought in from the Blind Flying Schools at Brandis, Neuberg and Poland, so that eventually a total of about 700 Ju 52/3ms were operating over the ten days it took to secure the island. In this time, the total number of personnel transported to Crete was about 24,000 men, of whom about 11,000 parachute troops were dropped and about 9,000 Mountain Troops were landed.

ABOVE: As the result of several conferences between the Luftwaffe Chief of the General Staff, the Chief of Staff of Luftflotte 4, the Chief of Staff of XI. Fliegerkorps and the Commander of Fliegerdivision 7, the plan to conquer Crete by employing XI. Fliegerkorps was proposed to Reichsmarschall Göring by General der Flieger Alexander Löhr, C-in-C Luftflotte 4, on 15 April 1941. Löhr is seen here, second from the right, with other senior officers including, far right, Generalmajor Ernst Schlemm, Chief of Staff, XI. Fliegerkorps and, far left, General der Flieger Günther Korten, later Luftwaffe Chief of Staff. The plan was approved by the Führer on 21 April.

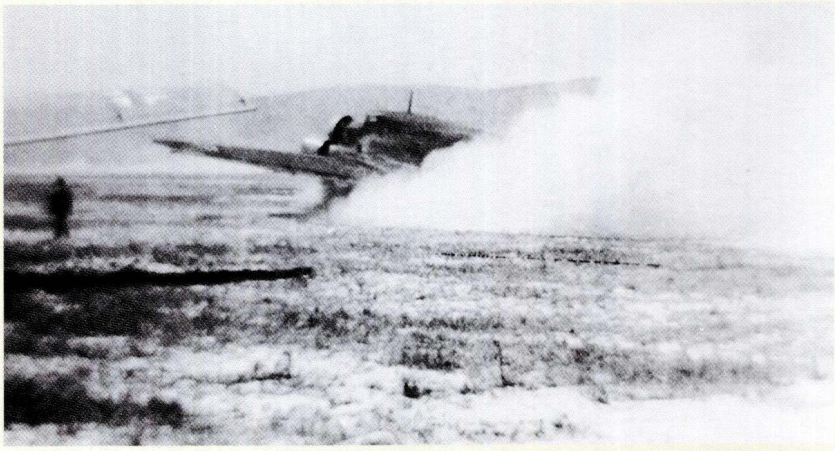
LEFT: A later photograph of General der Flieger Alexander Löhr, subsequently tried in Yugoslavia for war crimes and hanged on 26 February 1947.

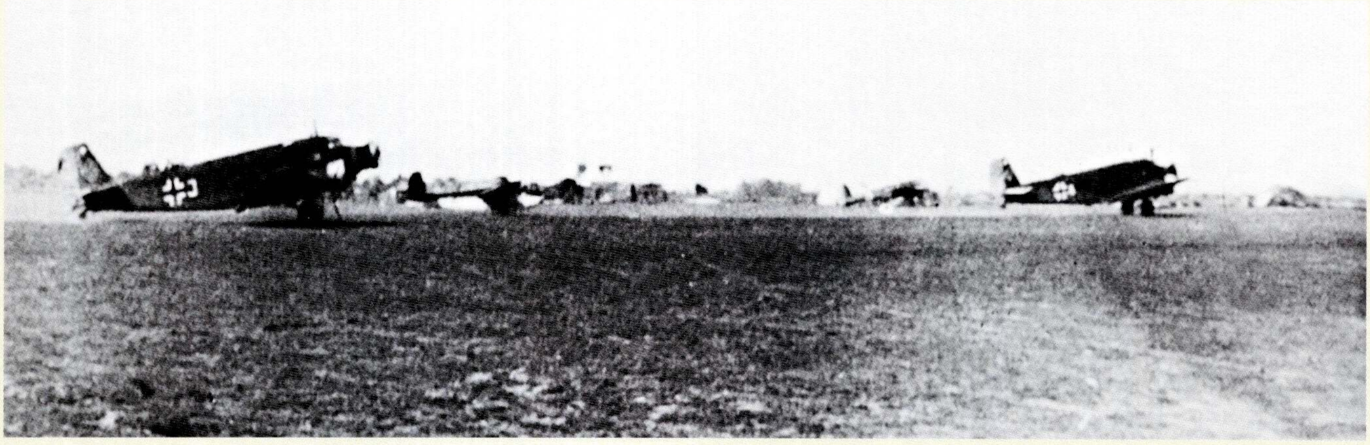
BELOW: Generaloberst Kurt Student, leader of XI. Fliegerkorps, the Luftwaffe's parachute and airborne command, in conversation with a glider pilot.



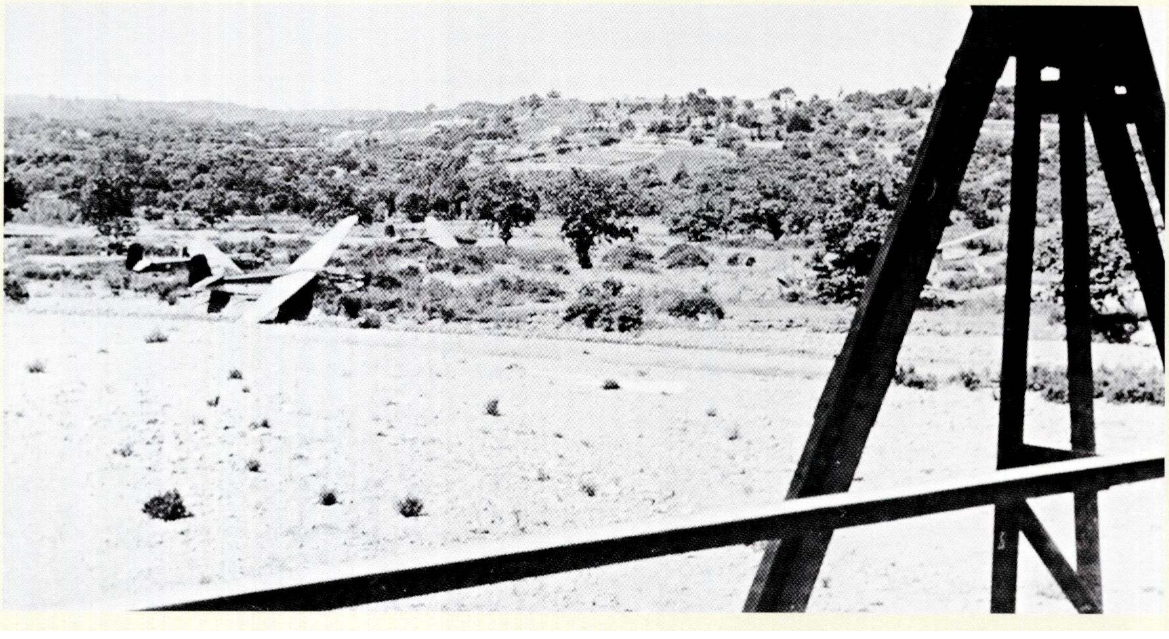
ABOVE: Paratroops boarding a Ju 52/3m of KGzbV 2 for the invasion of Crete. Although the Ju 52/3m could normally carry about 19 men, the average load for one of these aircraft flying to Crete was reduced to 12 men so that more equipment could also be transported.

RIGHT: A Ju52/3m transport starting amid clouds of dust and sand which particularly affected the airfields around Athens. Before 'Merkur', an airfield inspection officer decided the grassed landing grounds were too uneven for transport operations and had them ploughed up to make them level! In the hot, dry weather, this resulted in the slipstreams from dozens of aircraft raising huge clouds of dust. This Ju 52/3m was photographed as it began its take-off run from Topolia in Greece for a mission to Crete. During the first day of 'Merkur', the dust on overcrowded airfields lingered in the air for so long that it prevented following aircraft from taking off. Even fire engines spraying the ground with water did not subdue the dust and further problems were caused by shot-up aircraft crashing and blocking the runways. Returning Ju 52/3ms which were supposed to rapidly reload and be ready for another mission were therefore delayed, and refuelling also took longer than had been estimated. The effect of this chaos was that the planned operational timetable for the second wave of troop landings on Crete was seriously disrupted, with near disastrous results.



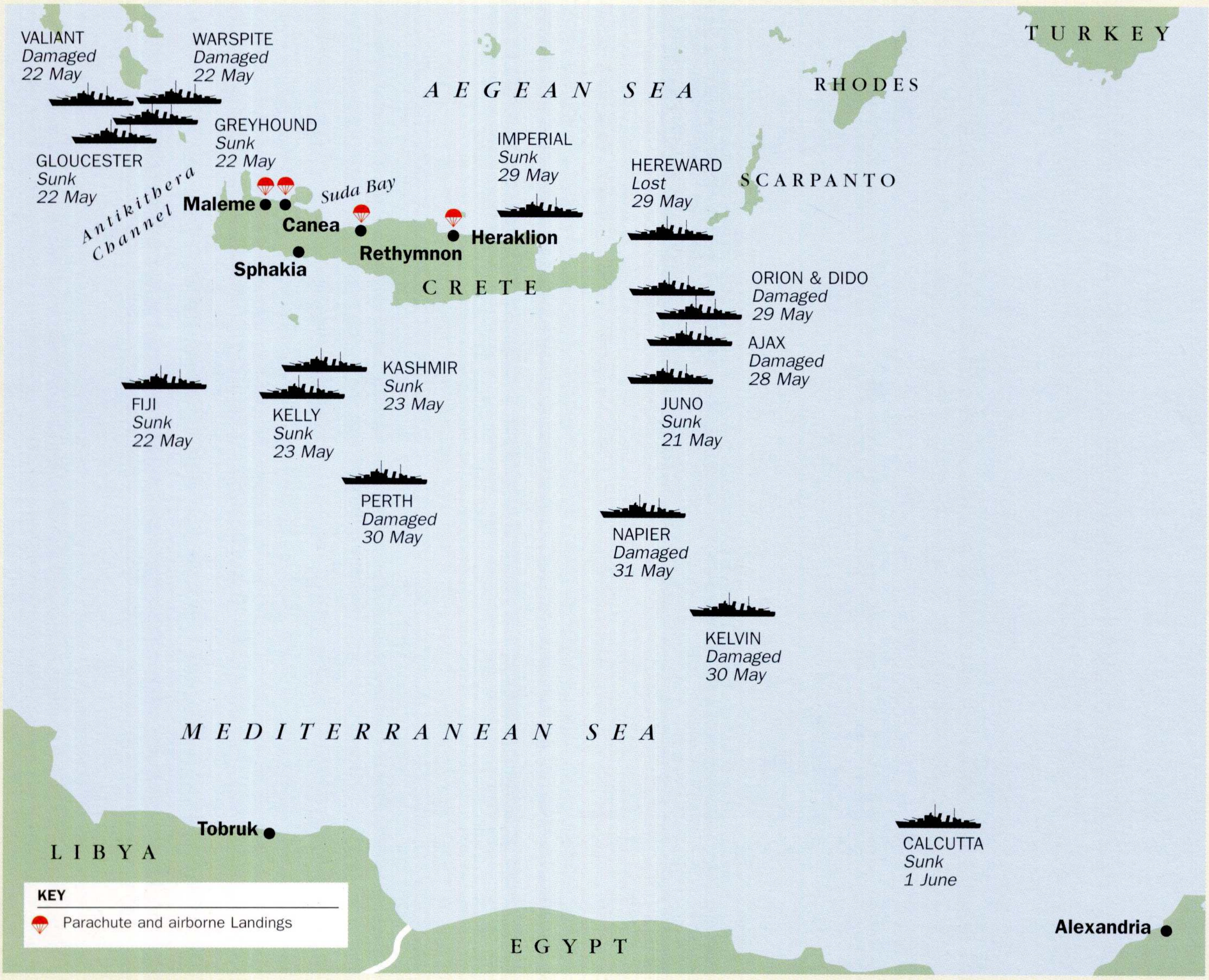


The first German troops to land on Crete arrived by glider 15 minutes ahead of the parachute force. These photograph show (*TOP*) Ju 52/3ms towing DFS 230 gliders off from Eleusis, (*MIDDLE*) a view from a DFS 230 with the Ju 52/3m towplane in the foreground and the island of Crete in the distance, and (*RIGHT*) gliders after landing on Crete.



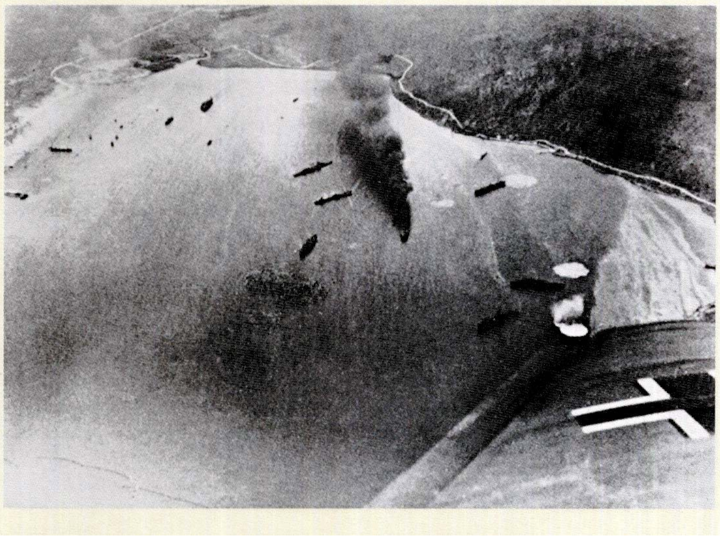
ABOVE AND INSET: A Ju 52/3m falling in flames after being hit by anti-aircraft fire over Crete. Moments later, the aircraft crashed into Suda Bay (*INSET*).

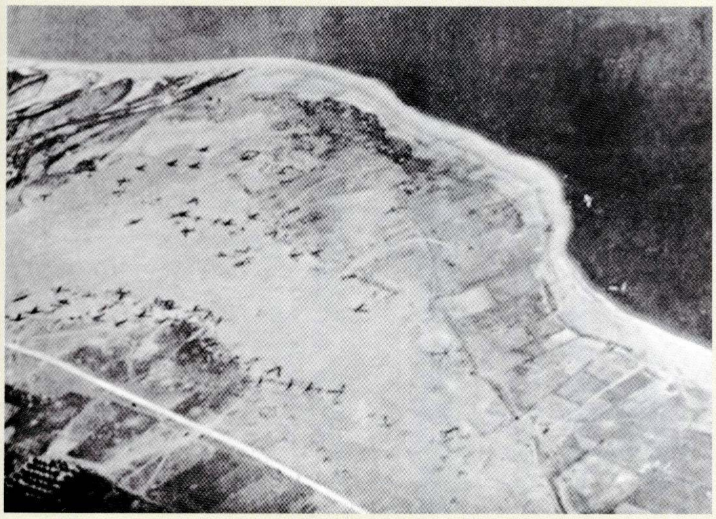
BELOW: Fallschirmjäger of the first wave soon after landing near Maleme airfield during the Crete operation. Unlike the British who used an X-type parachute, the Fallschirmjäger had no control over his parachute while in flight and, on landing, was thrown forward onto his hands and knees. Because of this and the consequent injury to wrists and knees, there was a high casualty rate on landing amongst German paratroops. On Crete, paratroop losses were high from the start; many died while still in the air or were injured on landing in unsuitable terrain, while any survivors were frequently pinned down or killed by Allied defensive fire. Of more tha 6,500 troops killed during the ten-day campaign, 5,140 were from the parachute force alone. Never again would such a large-scale parachute operation be attempted

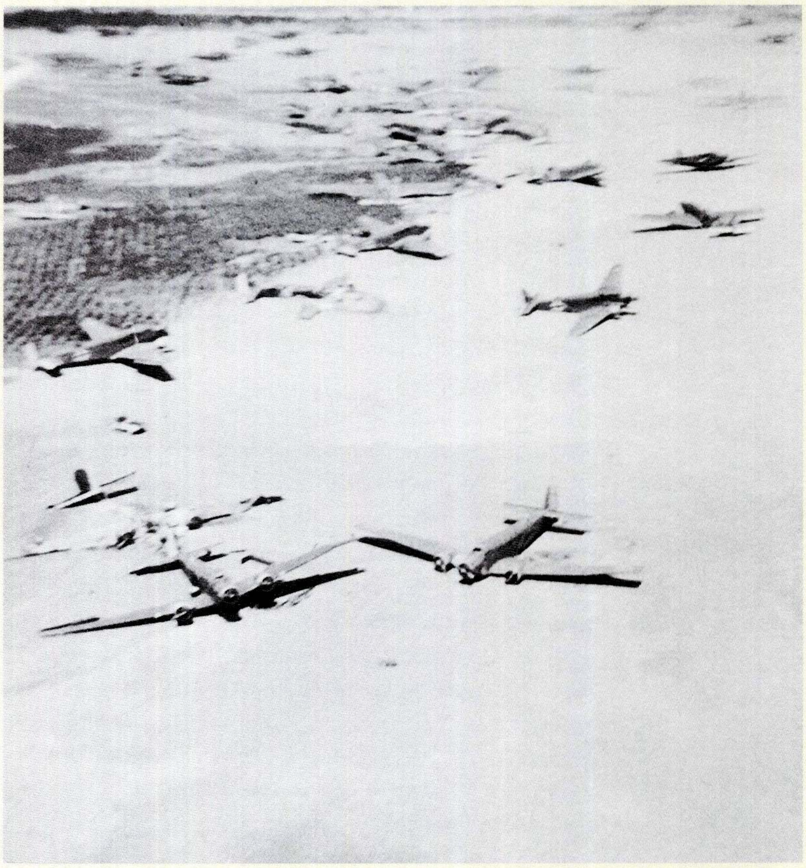

VALIANT
Damaged
22 May
WARSPITE
Damaged
22 May
GREYHOUND
Sunk
22 May
GLOUCESTER
Sunk
22 May
AEGEAN SEA
TURKEY
RHODES
IMPERIAL
Sunk
29 May
HEREWARD
Lost
29 May
SCARPANTO
Antikitbera Channel
Suda Bay
Maleme
Canea
Rethymnon
Heraklion
Sphakia
CRETE
ORION & DIDO
Damaged
29 May
AJAX
Damaged
28 May
KASHMIR
Sunk
23 May
FIJI
Sunk
22 May
KELLY
Sunk
23 May
JUNO
Sunk
21 May
PERTH
Damaged
30 May
NAPIER
Damaged
31 May
KELVIN
Damaged
30 May
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
Tobruk
LIBYA
CALCUTTA
Sunk
1 June
KEY
Parachute and airborne Landings
Alexandria
EGYPT

Map of Crete and surrounding area showing the sites of the main German parachute and airborne landings during Operation 'Merkur' and the locations of Allied warships sunk or damaged.

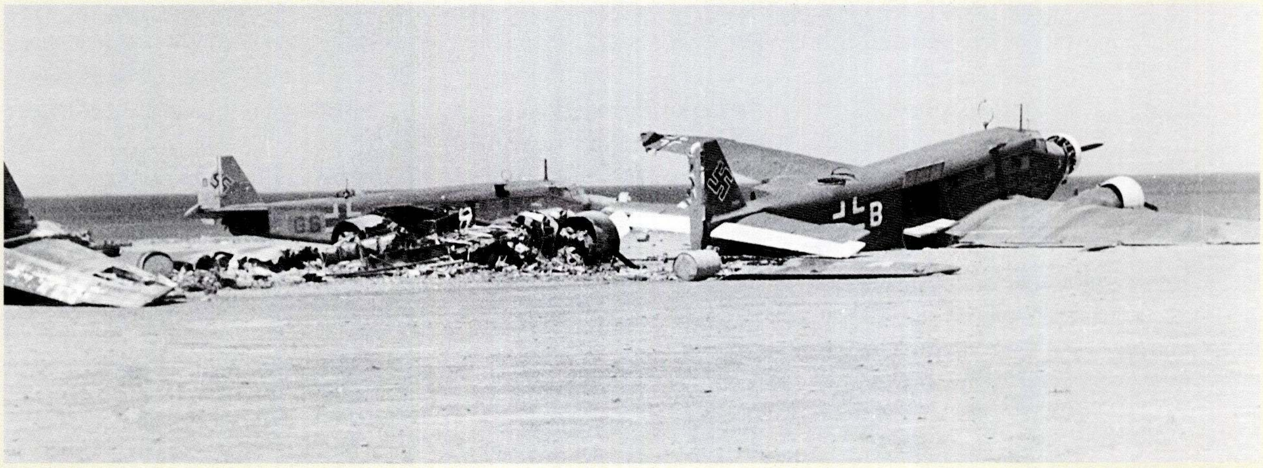
The attack on Crete was supported by VIII. Fliegerkorps which carried out attacks on the British naval base at Suda Bay. Here, (*BELOW LEFT*) Allied shipping is under attack by Ju 87s. (*RIGHT*) In addition to several hits scored on the cruiser HMS York (visible on far side of harbour, fifth from right), one tanker was set on fire, four merchant steamers were sunk and others severely damaged. The German plan of action called for the occupation of Suda Bay at the earliest opportunity in order to provide the necessary facilities for the supply of heavy arms by sea. This photograph was taken from a Ju 52/3m.



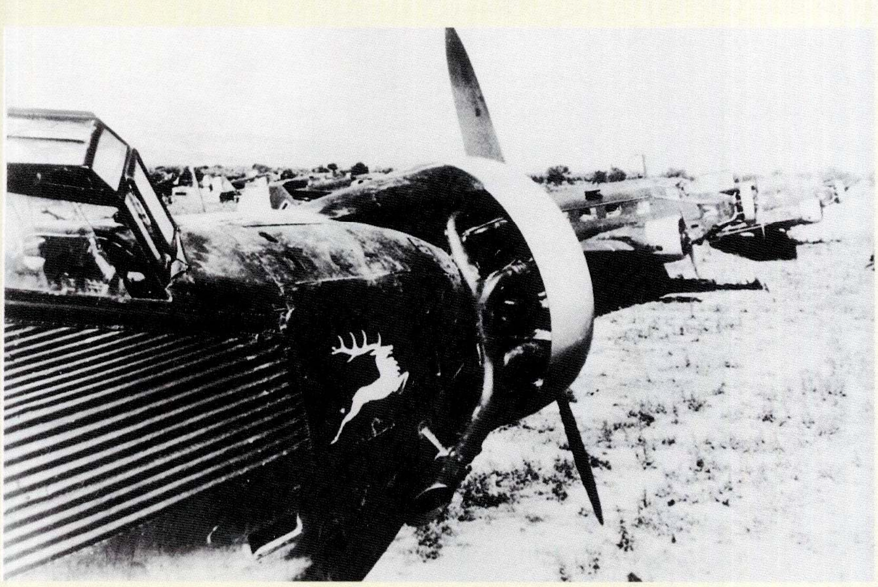


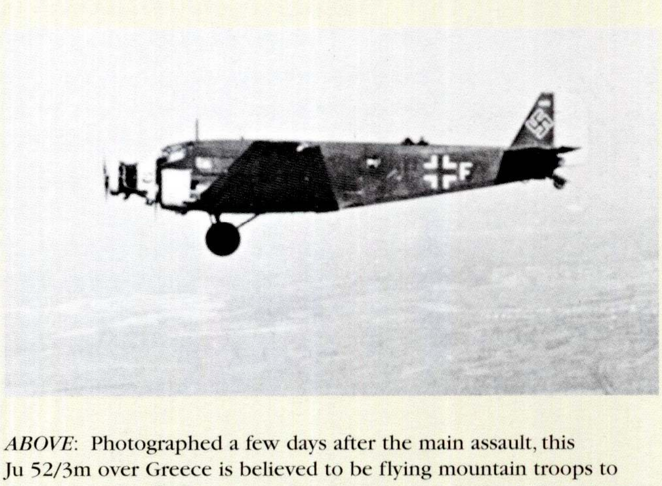


ABOVE, RIGHT AND BELOW: Wrecked Ju 52/3ms on Maleme airfield in Crete, evidence of the determination of XI. Fliegerkorps to secure the airfield, regardless of losses. The losses in transport aircraft during the Crete campaign were especially serious as the invasion of Russia was due to commence within a month. The difficulties of transporting material over the long distances in Russia were already realised, and the transport forces were faced with the urgent task of re-equipping, in the space of ten days, six of the transport Gruppen which had taken part in the battle for Crete. Many units were also withdrawn and the Mediterranean theatre was therefore left very short of air transport at a time when it was about to need it greatly. From this time forwards there was never an adequate supply of transport aircraft or crews for both fronts and, generally, the Mediterranean forces suffered from the greater urgency of supplies for Russia.



BELOW: Ju 52/3m transport aircraft of KGrzbV 106 photographed on Crete in early June. The leaping stag emblem was used by this Gruppe only during the Balkans and Crete campaigns in 1941. KGrzbV 106 was one of the units which dropped paratroops during the assault on Crete and remained in the area until about 10 June when it was recalled to Germany to prepare urgently for the forthcoming invasion of Russia.





ABOVE: Photographed a few days after the main assault, this Ju 52/3m over Greece is believed to be flying mountain troops to Crete. As with all German aircraft types serving in the Balkans, large areas of the aircraft have been painted yellow, but this machine is unusual in that the yellow nose cowling has been enhanced by a yellow band around the forward fuselage.

Continued from page 72

later killed in Russia, the third Blenheim being the first *Abschuss* for *Gefr.* Herbert Hortsmann, who survived the war with around seven claims. A little later, the same *Schwarm* pursued two long-range Hurricanes from 274 Sqn. which, each equipped with two 44 gallon non-jettisonable fuel tanks, had set out from Gerawla in Egypt to attack German transport aircraft still pouring in supplies and reinforcements to Maleme airfield. Only one Hurricane loss was officially reported but II./JG 77 claimed three *Luftsiege*, these being credited to *Uffz.* Rudolf Schmidt, *Gefr.* Günther Marschhausen, later missing in the Crimea, and *Fw.* Otto Köhler, killed at the beginning of *'Barbarossa'*.

A further battle with Blenheims in the afternoon ended tragically when II./JG 77 lost another *Kommandeur*, *Hptm.* Helmut Henz. A veteran of the Spanish Civil War also credited with four victories in 1939/1940, *Hptm.* Henz was hit by the defensive fire from a Blenheim upper gunner and his Bf 109 plunged into the Aegean near the islet of Anti Cythere. Henz had led the *Gruppe* for only one month and had become its commanding officer following the death of *Hptm.* Lange on 23 April.

On the ground, the German mountain troops and paratroopers slowly made progress against fierce resistance, but Freyberg realised that his position was untenable and began withdrawing his forces to the south of the island.

Last Claims

On 26 May, Allied bombers of 204 Group were ordered to operate against the German lines at Maleme while Marylands of 24 Sqn., SAAF, acting as bombers and transport aircraft, dropped supplies to the defenders of Rethymnon. Six long-range Hurricanes of 274 Sqn. attacking some Ju 52/3ms were also engaged and *Oblt.* Walter Hoeckner of 6./JG 77, who had recently gained his first victory, was credited with two Blenheims and a Hurricane, while *Lt.* Emil Omert of III./JG 77 claimed a Blenheim. I.(*J*)/LG 2 was also in action, its *Kommandeur*, Herbert Ihlefeld, and his wingman, *Lt.* Friedrich Geisshardt, each being credited with a Hurricane. Although all four victors later received the Knight's Cross, only Ihlefeld survived the war. It is, perhaps, surprising that considering the generally confused conditions there was not more overclaiming and misidentification than actually occurred. For example, the Blenheim claimed by Omert was in fact a Maryland manned by a Free French crew, but of the three Hurricanes claimed by Hoeckner, Ihlefeld and Geisshardt, two were indeed reported shot down by fighters while the third, again flown by a Free French pilot, F/Lt. Paul Jacquier, was reported to have been lost to anti-aircraft fire. Otherwise, losses and claims are almost equal.

For the Allies, 26 May marked their last attempt to support the Crete garrison on any scale. The German breakout from the Maleme perimeter and subsequent push to Canea had enabled the German forces on the island to establish a bridgehead and, on 27 May, Major-General Freyberg decided to begin the evacuation of the island. Already short of transport, by whatever means possible the Allied soldiers made their way to the small port of Sphakia on the south side of the island, from where they were to be evacuated by the Royal Navy.

At 04.40 hrs on the 26th, part of III./JG 77 took off to transfer from Molaoi in Greece to the Crete airfield at Maleme. Conditions on the airfield were appalling, as Fw. Johann Pichler recalled:

"About 100 crashed aircraft were lying around the airfield and landing was a risky operation. All day long we sat in the slit trenches with nothing to eat or drink. It was extremely hot and we were under constant attack by Blenheims and Hurricanes. However, Maleme had the advantage that we no longer had to make the frightening flights over the sea and we could fly sorties in record time against the fiercely resisting British anti-aircraft and artillery positions. Each pilot took off singly, attacked the target, fired all his ammunition and returned to be re-armed and refuelled for another sortie, all while Ju 52 transports were landing or unloading troops and supplies and with the damaged or burnt-out Ju 52s still lying around. It was a real graveyard for the Transportflieger and a hectic scene of confusion and disorder."

Due to these chaotic conditions, it proved impossible for the aircraft mechanics to maintain an acceptable number of serviceable machines and, as in Greece, all airworthy aircraft were again assembled and allocated to III./JG 77 while II./JG 77, which had lost its commanding officer and a number of its pilots, was rested. Reinforcements were then called in and III./JG 52, under the command of *Major* Gotthard Handrick, was recalled from Bucharest-Baneasa and ordered to Molaoi. This unit could now revert to its correct designation, I./JG 28 being used

BELOW: Major Gotthard Handrick, Kommandeur of III/JG 52. Towards the end of the fighting in Crete, Handrick was ordered to move his Gruppe to Molaoi to reinforce III./JG 77.

only for camouflage purposes while the *Gruppe* was based in Rumania. III./JG 52's patrols, *freie Jagd* and bomber escort sorties were without incident, the obvious end to the defence of Crete now being so close that the RAF did not wish to risk losing any more aircraft to no purpose. On the 27th, *Uffz.* Werner Rode of III./JG 52 crash-landed his 'Emil' at Molaoi but was unhurt despite the total destruction of his aircraft. The following day, another Bf 109 E was destroyed when taking off from Molaoi, but this time, the pilot, *Uffz.* Hans Güldner was injured.

> **Fear we must recognise that Crete is no longer tenable and that troops must be withdrawn as far as possible. It has been impossible to withstand weight of enemy attack, which has been on unprecedented scale and had been through force of circumstances practically unopposed.**
>
> Telegram from Wavell to Churchill, 27 May 1941.

On 29 May, *Oblt.* Erich Friedrich, a future *Ritterkreuzträger*, claimed his fourth victory, also his last during '*Merkur*' and the only one for *Stab*/JG 77 in the Crete area. His victim, Hurricane pilot Flt. Sgt. Peter Nicolson of 274 Sqn., had been chosen to drop a message to the Allied garrison deployed around Rethymnon, which had been surrounded by advancing German troops. Written in code, the message ordered the troops to withdraw southwards to Sphakia where troops were concentrating prior to evacuation. However, Nicolson was shot down off Rethymnon, apparently before his mission was accomplished and the garrison was forced to surrender. Another 'Emil' belonging to III./JG 52 was totally destroyed near Molaoi when it crashed after running out of fuel. The pilot was unhurt.

On the 30th, II./JG 77 lost *Oblt.* Karl-Heinz Sandmann who was injured when his Bf 109 E crashed and was completely destroyed near Sofia. Sandmann, who had served with I./JG 27 from the end of 1939 to 1940, recovered from his wounds but was declared unfit for further front-line duties. In December 1941 he was at Berlin-Gatow before moving on to serve with various commands and ended the war on the staff of a *Jagdfliegerführer*. Due to the condition of Molaoi airfield, two pilots from III./JG 52 severely damaged their machines in landing accidents.

The evacuation of Crete was begun on the night of 28/29 May and was completed by dawn on 2 June when the last ship left the island bound for Alexandria. German aircraft based in the Dodecanese bombed the ships wherever they were found, losses including the anti-aircraft cruiser *Calcutta* and the destroyers *Hereward* and *Imperial*. The cruiser *Orion* was damaged by a single bomb which killed 260 men and wounded 280. Now all Crete was in German hands and the *Luftwaffe* could reinforce the small fighter detachments on the newly conquered island. *Lt.* Otto Becker of III./JG 52 was lightly wounded when he wrote off his Bf 109 E while crash-landing on Maleme airfield.

> **The operation of evacuating troops from Crete has now terminated with the arrival of CS15 Force and 3,900 troops. Consider total evacuated to be just over 17,000.**
>
> **5,500 were left at Sphakia and had orders to capitulate [...] Total therefore left behind was about 7,000.**
>
> Signal from C-in-C ME to Admiralty, 1 June 1941

As in *'Marita'*, the Germans' advances allowed them to liberate many of their captured comrades. Since Allied forces usually evacuated unwounded PoWs to Egypt very quickly, it was in the abandoned hospitals that the wounded flying personnel, paratroops and mountain troops were found. Once freed, most flying personnel eventually returned to their units, but of the two men lost on 16 May, a few days before the invasion, *Lt.* Harald Mann was so severely wounded he was declared unfit for further front-line duties. He was returned to Germany and for a long time received medical attention in the military hospital at Berlin-Tegel. When released, he went to the RLM in May 1943 and was on the staff of the OKL in August 1944. *Ofw.* Herbert Perrey, the captured pilot injured by an Allied soldier, returned to III./JG 77 and claimed three additional victories in Russia but, at the end of 1941, perhaps because of a nervous breakdown following his ordeal in Crete, left his *Staffel* and is believed to have joined a second-line unit.

'Merkur' Losses

At the end of '*Merkur*', *Luftflotte* 4 reported to Reichsmarschall Göring that the task had been completed and that Crete was "clear of enemy forces". VIII. *Fliegerkorps* was then ordered to withdraw from Crete and the remnants of JG 77, I.(*J*)/LG 2 and III./JG 52 received orders to move back to Rumania to protect the Ploesti oilfields and also to prepare for the next assault, *'Barbarossa'*, the attack on Russia.

The Crete campaign had lasted only sixteen days, but in that period JG 77 and I.(*J*)/LG 2 had supported all the fighting. It is therefore not surprising that whereas JG 77 suffered six casualties during *'Marita'*, a longer campaign which involved opposition from three air forces over two countries, at the end of '*Merkur*', the *Geschwader's* casualties totalled eleven pilots: three, including a *Kommandeur*, killed in action; five PoWs, including a *Staffelkapitän* evacuated to Egypt, and three pilots wounded. Recorded aircraft losses amounted to 22 destroyed and five others damaged but, as mentioned earlier, the totals must have been significantly greater.[12] Conversely, I.(*J*)/LG 2 had no pilot losses and its material losses were certainly limited, a fact which perhaps indicates the extent to which JG 77 alone, once it lost the support of JG 54 and JG 27, was committed to the battle.

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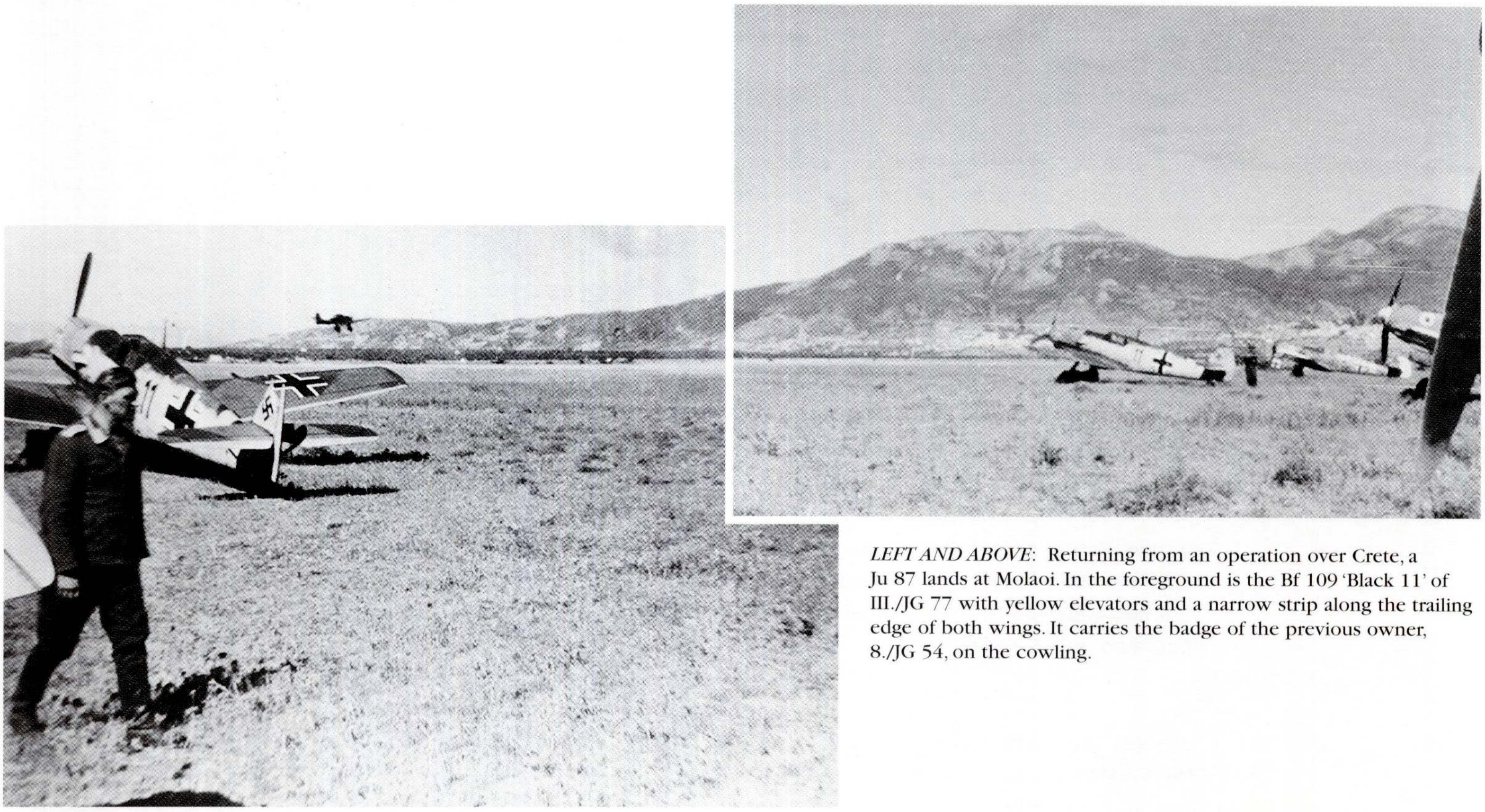
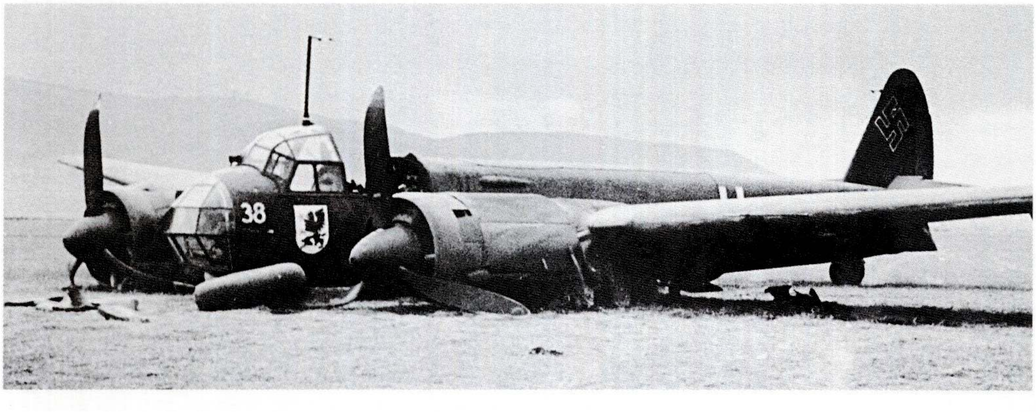
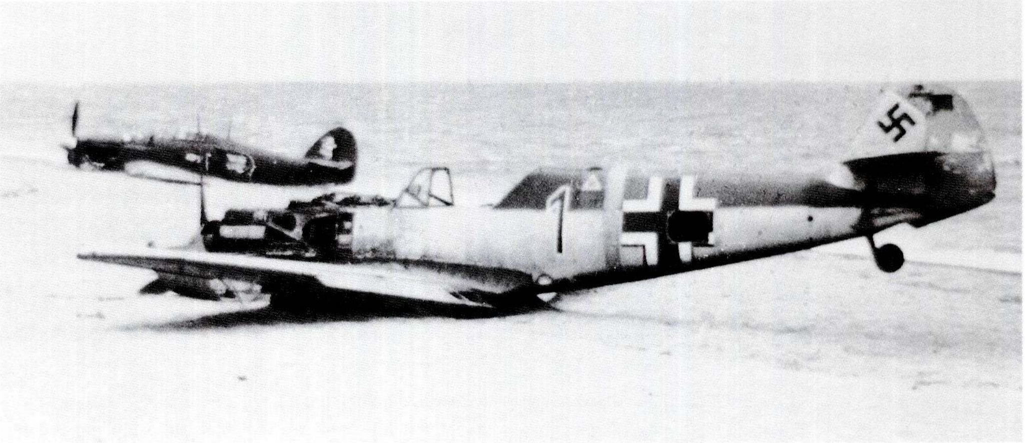
[12] By 27 May, II./JG 77 had only a handful of aircraft remaining.



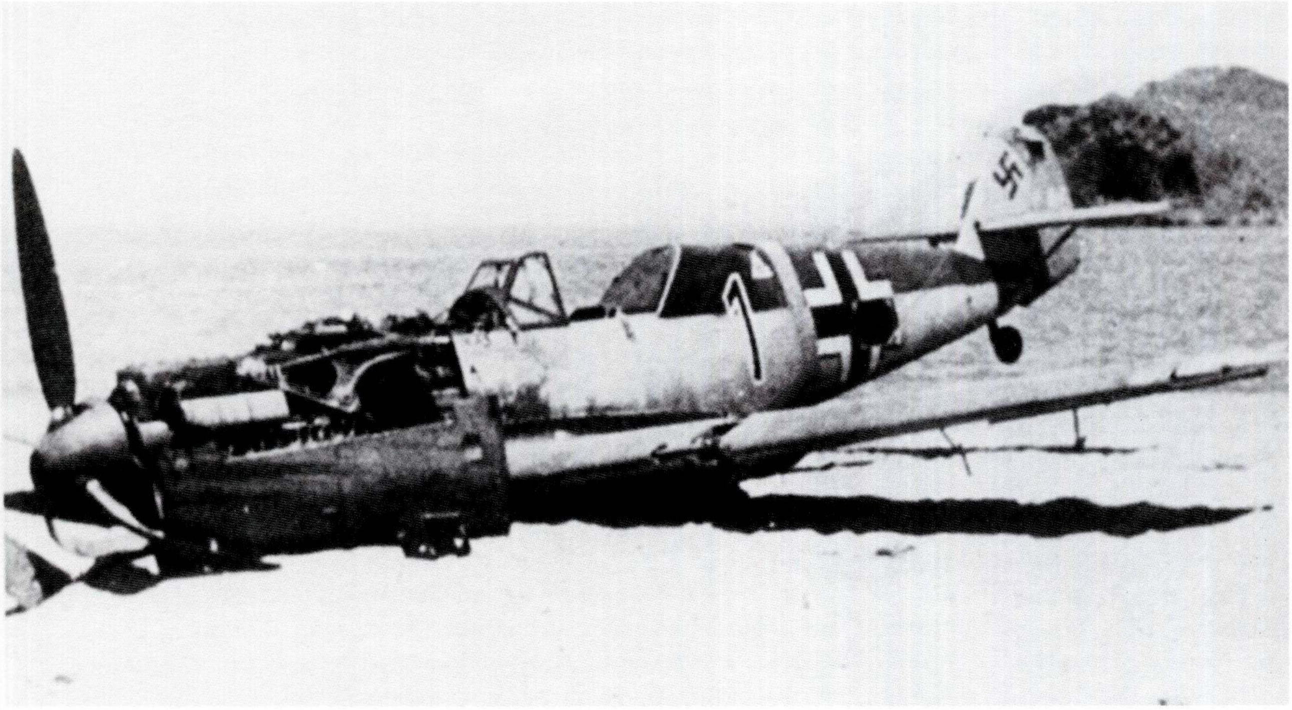
LEFT AND ABOVE: Returning from an operation over Crete, a Ju 87 lands at Molaoi. In the foreground is the Bf 109 'Black 11' of III./JG 77 with yellow elevators and a narrow strip along the trailing edge of both wings. It carries the badge of the previous owner, 8./JG 54, on the cowling.



LEFT: In order to reinforce the bomber units of Luftflotte 4, I./LG 1 was transferred from the West to operate under VIII. Fliegerkorps and was based at Plovdiv-Krumowo. On 28 March 1941, this Ju 88 A-4 was returning from a training flight when the pilot, Uffz. Heinz Abracht, made a bad landing and the undercarriage collapsed. The Geschwader's red griffin emblem on the nose was the coat of arms of Greifswald where the unit was first formed. Later, on 22 May, the Ju 88s of I./LG 1 succeeded in scoring several hits on the Royal Navy cruiser HMS Naiad which was badly damaged; two turrets were put out of action, various compartments were flooded and the ship's speed reduced to 16 knots.

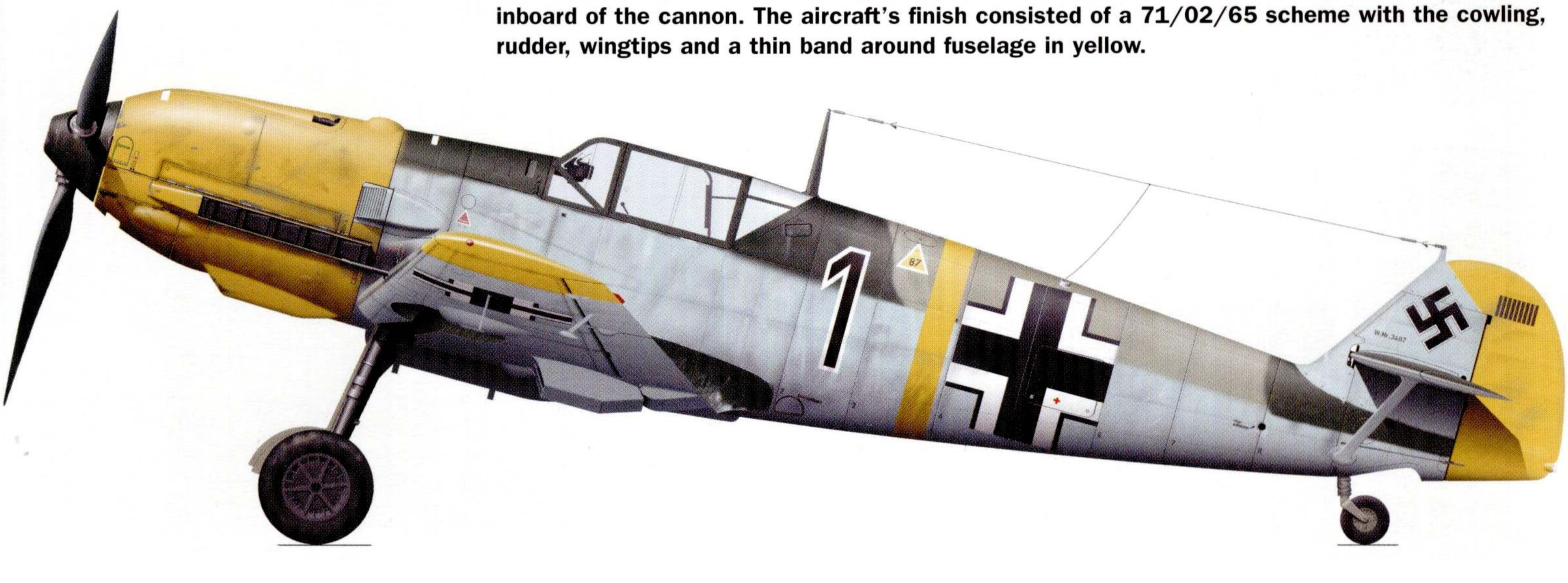


*THIS PAGE:*On 20 May 1941, the first day of 'Merkur', four aircraft of II./JG 77 were lost. This aircraft, 'Black 1', the Bf 109 E-7 W.Nr. 3487 flown by Ofw. Werner Petermann of 5./JG 77, was attacking Allied positions on Crete when it was shot down by ground fire. Petermann crash-landed on the beach near Canea and his machine came to rest close to an RAF Hurricane which may be seen in the background. Ofw. Petermann was taken prisoner and was later held in New Zealand. He returned to Germany after the war.



Messerschmitt Bf 109 E 'Black 1' flown by Ofw. Werner Petermann of 5./JG 77

This aircraft, W.Nr. 3487, was originally constructed as an E-1 but was later modified to E-7 standards. The original MG 17 wing armament was removed and MG FF cannon fitted, together with the later, square type of canopy with pilot's head armour. The aircraft retained its uncapped spinner and the original MG ports in the wing leading edge were still visible inboard of the cannon. The aircraft's finish consisted of a 71/02/65 scheme with the cowling, rudder, wingtips and a thin band around fuselage in yellow.



Jabo activity during 'Merkur'

As soon as the attack on Crete began and it became apparent that there was going to be little or no opposition from the RAF, all VIII. *Fliegerkorps'* single and twin-engined fighters were made available for use as fighter-bombers and ground-strafing aircraft. The bomber and dive-bomber units had already found plenty of targets among the numerous warships of the Royal Navy patrolling around Crete, and, in order to reduce the flying distance to future targets, the Stukas moved from the mainland to Scarpanto, an Italian-held island in the Dodecanese. Here, they were sometimes joined by the *Jabo Staffeln* 5. and 7./JG 77, which also used the island as a forward base for attacks against enemy shipping.

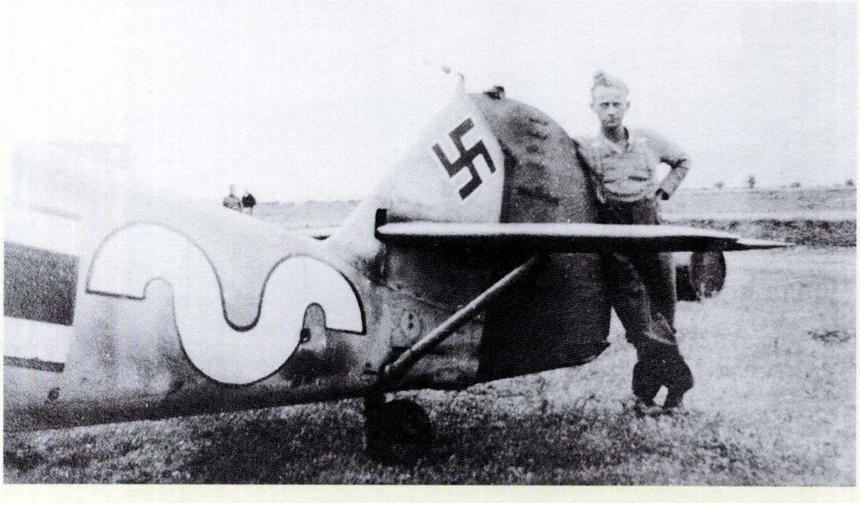
The fighters action against Crete began on 20 May and targets included artillery and machine-gun emplacements, enemy troop concentrations, armoured vehicles and any potential points of resistance. The attacks were intended to soften up the defences in preparation for the second wave of parachute troops landing in the Rethymnon and Heraklion areas. This was difficult work because all important points had been well prepared against attack and all heavy guns were well camouflaged. Unfortunately, due to the clouds of dust created on the congested mainland airfields by the multiple take-offs associated with the first lift in the morning, the transport aircraft carrying the paratroops for the second lift were delayed and arrived an hour later than planned. However, VIII. *Fliegerkorps* was not informed of the change in timing, so that when the transports arrived the effect of the air attacks had long since subsided and the anti-aircraft defences had had ample time to recover. The parachute troops therefore jumped directly into enemy ground fire without any protection.

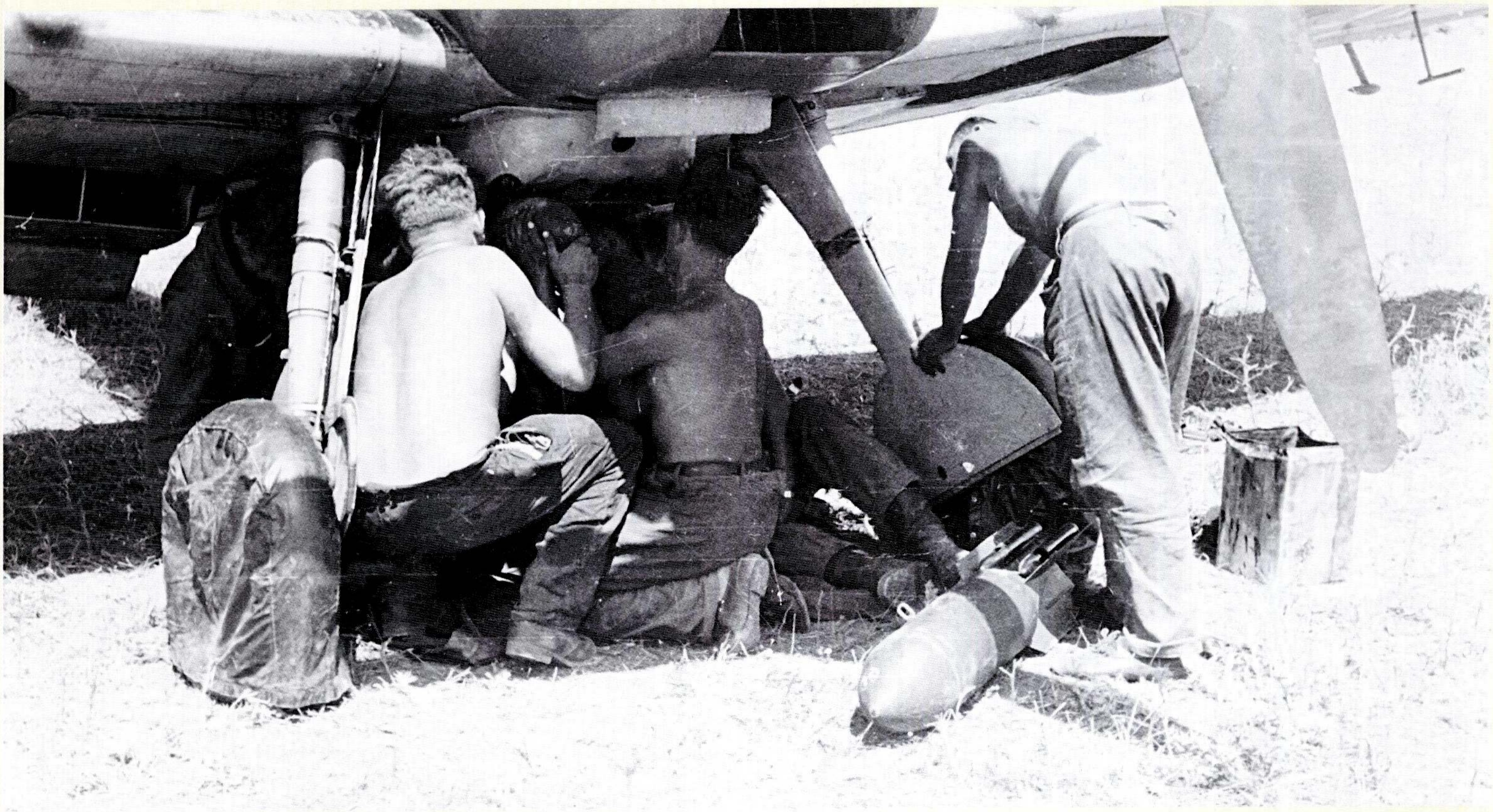
Later, the fighter-bombers played an important part in the outcome of the overall battle by operating against enemy naval forces which were bringing in troops to reinforce Crete or searching for an expected seaborne invasion fleet. The *Jabos'* greatest success occurred on 22 May when II. and III./JG 77 were in action against British naval units off Crete throughout the day, some pilots flying four, five or six sorties. Generally, *Jabo* attacks against ships were carried out at low level with the pilots climbing at the last minute to lob their bombs into the ships, but on 22 May, most were dive attacks made from out of the sun, the pilots aligning a painted line on the canopy side window with the horizon in order to achieve the correct dive angle.

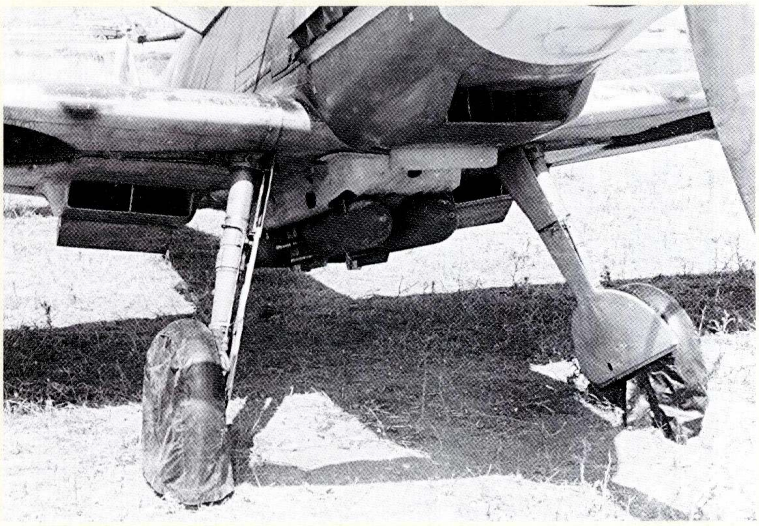
Warships known to have been hit by bombs dropped from Bf 109s include the cruiser HMS *Fiji* and the battleships HMS *Warspite* and HMS *Valiant*. The cruiser HMS *Fiji*, having already been subjected to some 20 air attacks during the day, was already low on ammunition when *Oblt.* Wolfdieter Huy, *Staffelkapitän* of 7./JG 77, dived out of cloud and dropped his bomb close alongside. The explosion holed *Fiji* in her engine room and brought her to a stop. Later, a single aircraft, believed from I.(*J*)/LG 2, sunk the now defenceless ship. The battleship *Warspite* was struck twice during the day and seriously damaged, direct hits being claimed by *Oblt.* Huy and *Oblt.* Kurt Ubben, the *Staffelkapitän* of 8./JG 77. In one of these attacks, *Warspite's* starboard secondary and anti-aircraft batteries were completely destroyed. *Oblt.* Otto Grobe, who had joined 5./JG 77 in mid-1940, was shot down and captured while attacking warships between Crete and Kithera, and at noon, a *Kette* from 7./JG 77 comprising *Oblt.* Huy, *Fw.* Heinz Furth and *Fw.* Johann Pichler took off to attack the battleship *Valiant*. All three pilots were credited with damaging the ship, though British sources state she was hit by a single bomb. The pilots returned, but *Fw.* Pichler was injured when he belly-landed his Bf 109 E-7, W.Nr. 1963, at Molaoi. A further, less successful attack was carried out before the ships sailed beyond the range of the Bf 109s.

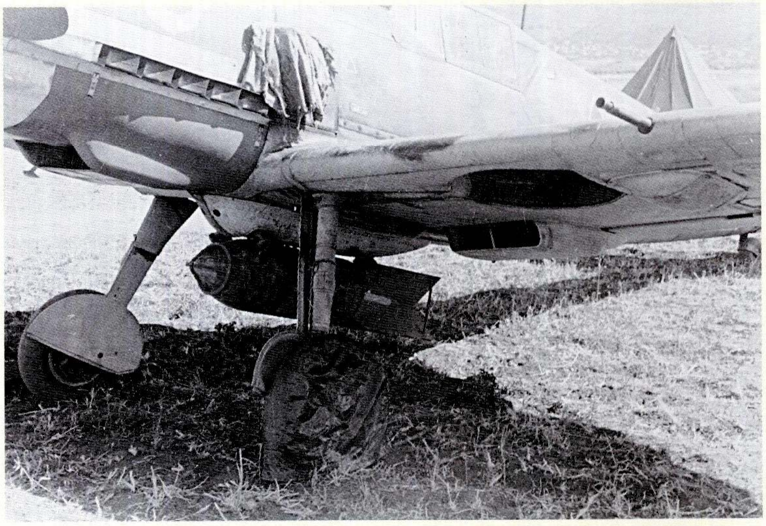
In addition to the attacks carried out by the *Luftwaffe's* fighter-bombers, British naval forces around Crete were also attacked by other Axis aircraft, the *Stukageschwadern* proving particularly effective. Between 20 May and 1 June, six cruisers and seven destroyers were sunk and an aircraft carrier and five battleships damaged, some so extensively that they had to be withdrawn for several months for major repairs.

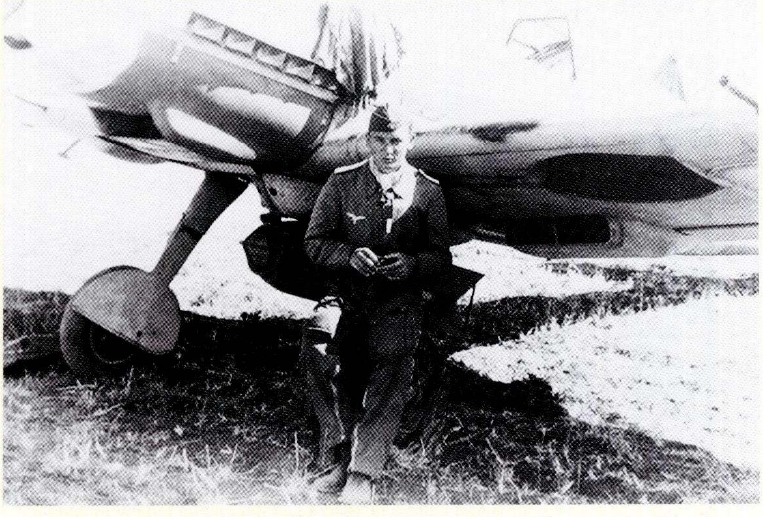
BELOW: On 27 April 1941, the 11,363 BRT troopship 'Slamat' was bombed and sunk. The Staffelkapitän of 7./JG 77, Hptm. Wolfdieter Huy and his Rottenflieger, Uffz. Pfeiffer, were both credited with direct hits and the ship sank after also being attacked by Ju 87 and Ju 88 units. Photographed at Tanagra on the same day as the sinking, the tail of Hptm. Huy's Bf 109 E 'White 2', W.Nr. 4931, has already received an appropriate marking, the 'Slamat' being represented by the fifth and largest ship silhouette.



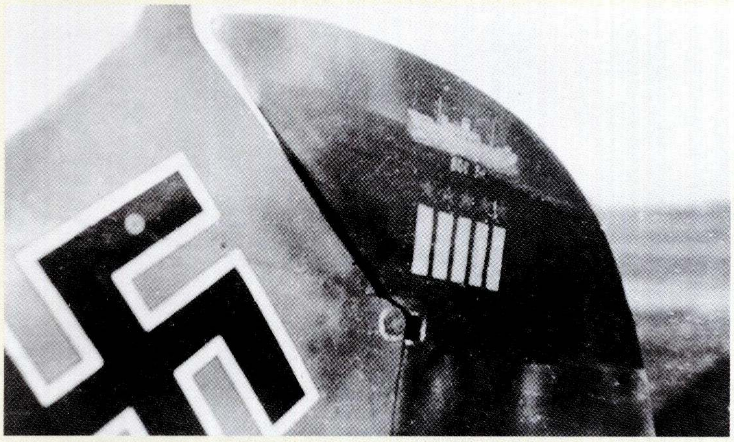




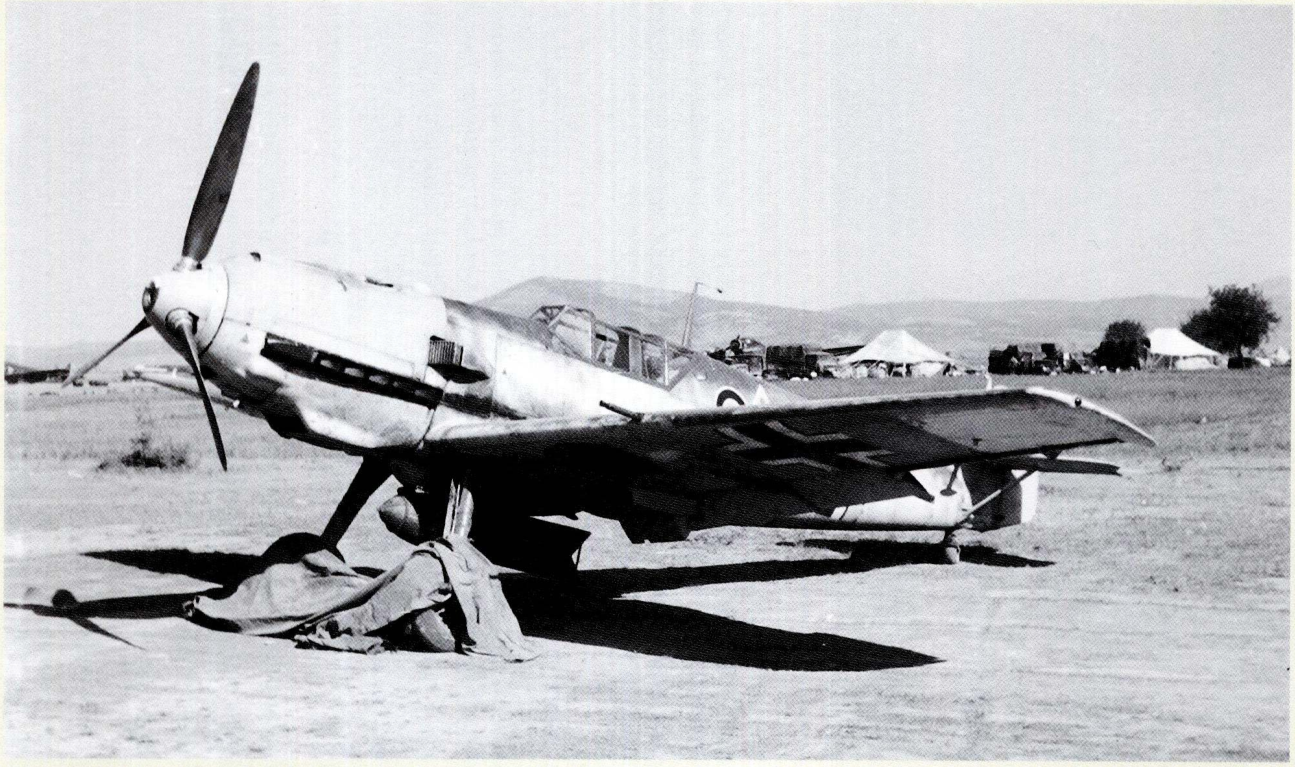




One of the aircraft employed as a fighter-bomber for attacks on British shipping and gun positions on Crete was this machine of 9./JG 77, seen here with its wheels covered to protect the tyres from the sun's rays. Photographs (*TOP AND MIDDLE LEFT*) show the aircraft with four 50 kg bombs, while in the view (*ABOVE*), the rack has been changed and the aircraft has been armed with a single 250 kg weapon. Just visible in this view, too, is the black triangle of II.(Schlacht)/LG 2 which, up until 30 April, had been operating this aircraft. (*LEFT*) Lt. Emil Omert on Molaoi airfield with the same machine loaded with a with a 250 kg bomb. Note the yellow cowling and the Blue 65 replacement panels which were fitted immediately behind the spinner and on both sides of the nose over the exhausts.



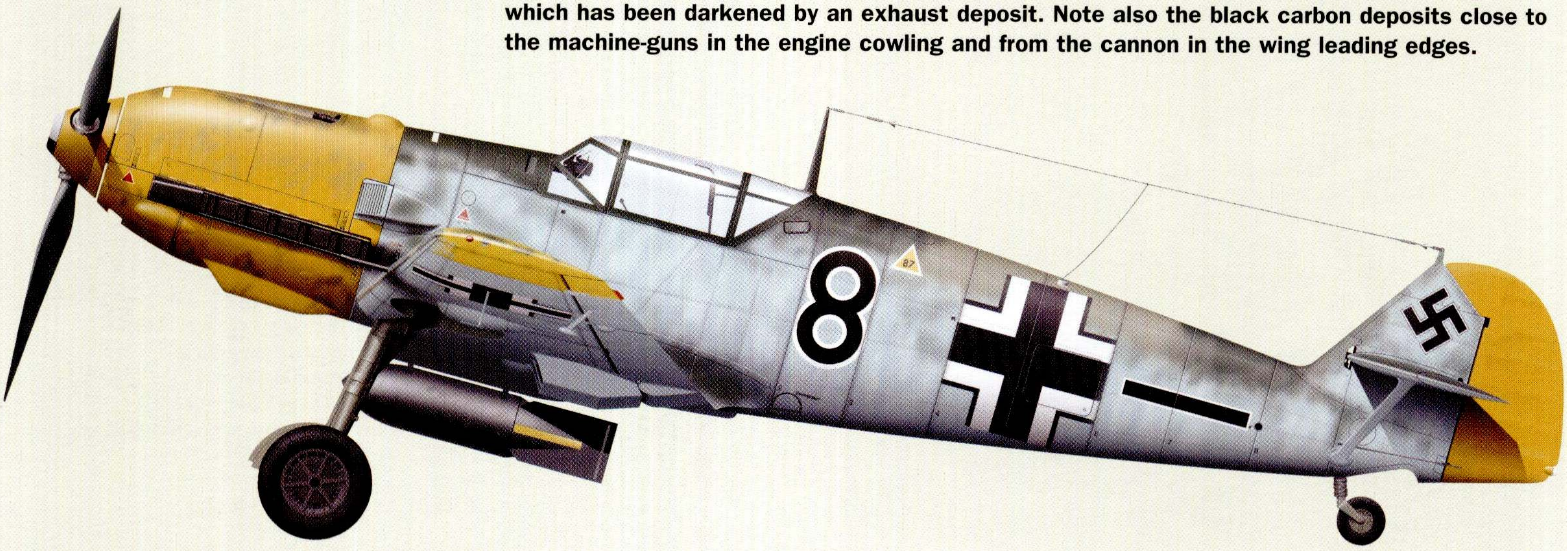
LEFT: Several Bf 109s of III./JG 77 carried mission markers on their rudder to record their bombing attacks during the Balkans campaign and the battle for Crete. Many aircraft still retained these symbols long after the Gruppe had moved to Russia where, by the time of this photograph, the pilot of this aircraft had also been credited with five victories.

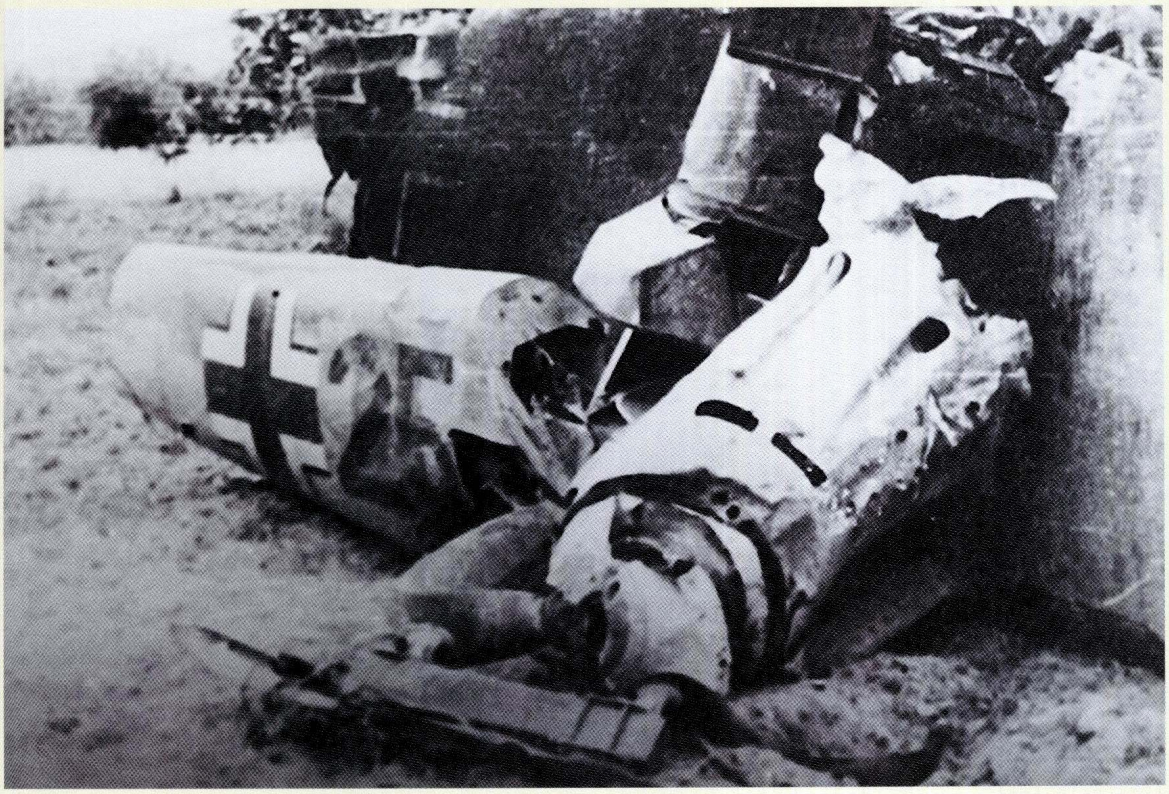


LEFT: With its tyres protected from the sun, this Bf 109 E of 5./JG 77 at Molaoi in May 1941 has already been loaded with a 250 kg bomb prior to a sortie to Crete. The spinner, nose, rudder and wingtips have been painted yellow, but the yellow on the leading edge of the wingtips is badly eroded as a result of the abrasive dust on Balkan airfields.

Messerschmitt Bf 109 E 'Black 8' of 5./JG 77, Molaoi, Greece, May 1941

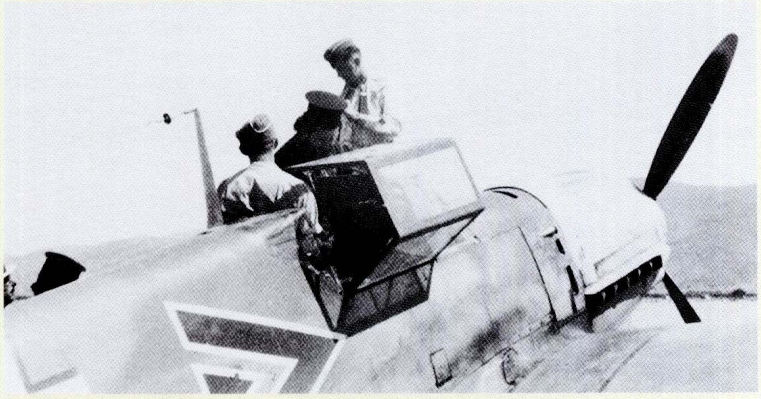
Still retaining an early, rounded canopy, this aircraft was otherwise converted to E-3/B or E-4/B standard with curved head armour and a bomb rack. The high demarcation 71/02/65 camouflage shows signs of weathering, particularly under the cowling and over the wing root which has been darkened by an exhaust deposit. Note also the black carbon deposits close to the machine-guns in the engine cowling and from the cannon in the wing leading edges.



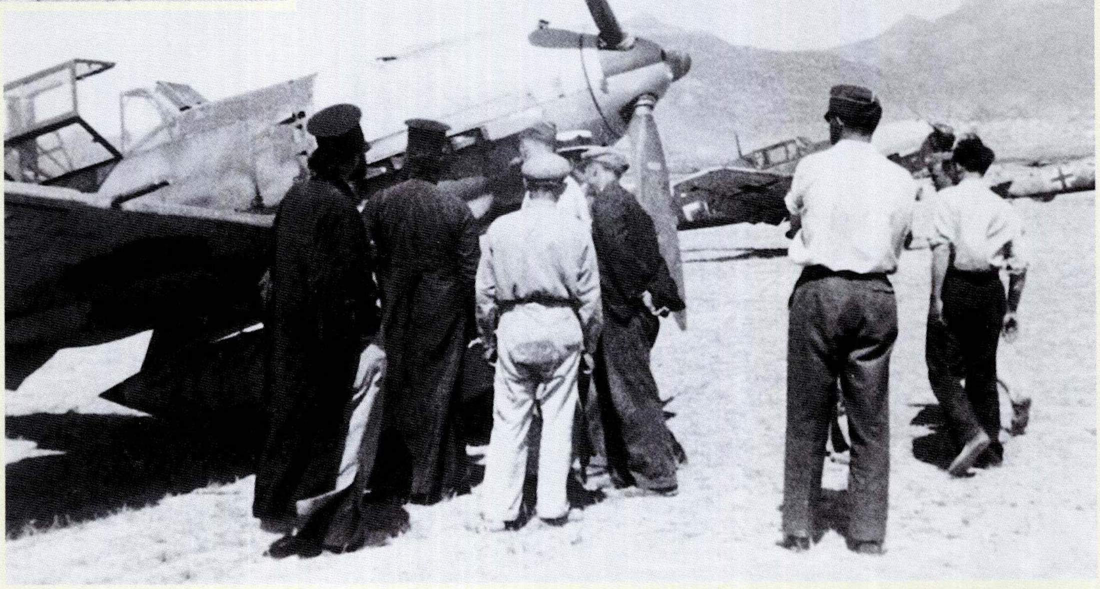


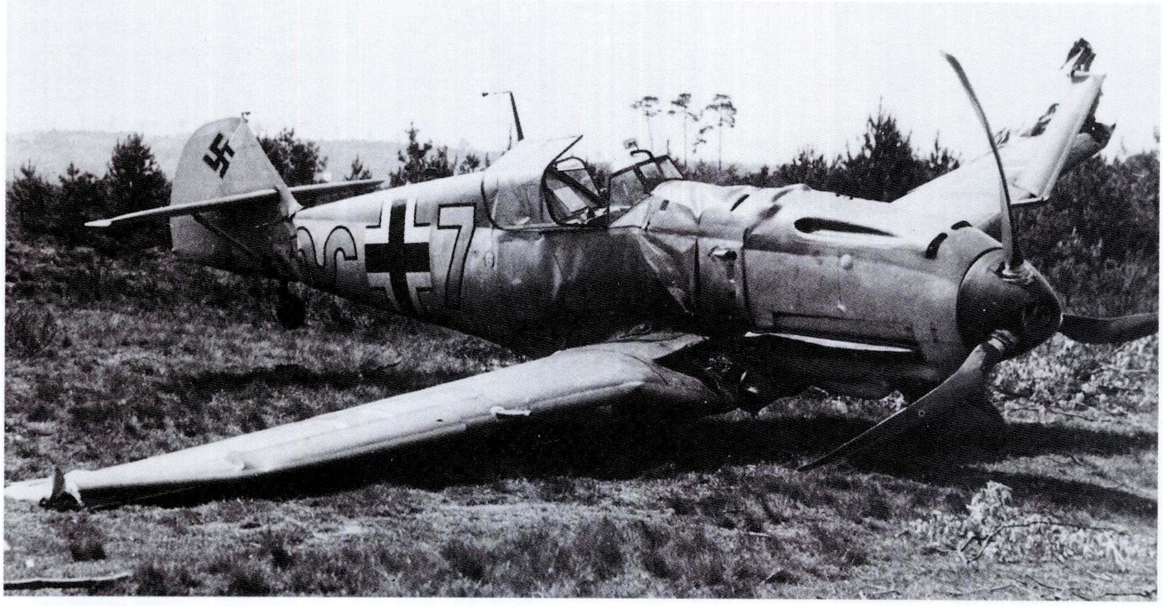
LEFT: Fw. Johann Pichler crashed his Bf 109 E-7, W.Nr. 1963 at Molaoi after returning from an attack on the Royal Navy battleship HMS Warspite on 22 May 1941. Classified as having received 85% damage, the aircraft was a write-off. Note the high aircraft number painted on the fuselage of this aircraft which was possibly delivered to the unit only several days earlier.

RIGHT: In order to carry out anti-shipping operations in the waters around Crete, part of III./JG 77 transferred to the Italian island of Scarpanto. This photograph shows the arrival of the unit's ground crews.

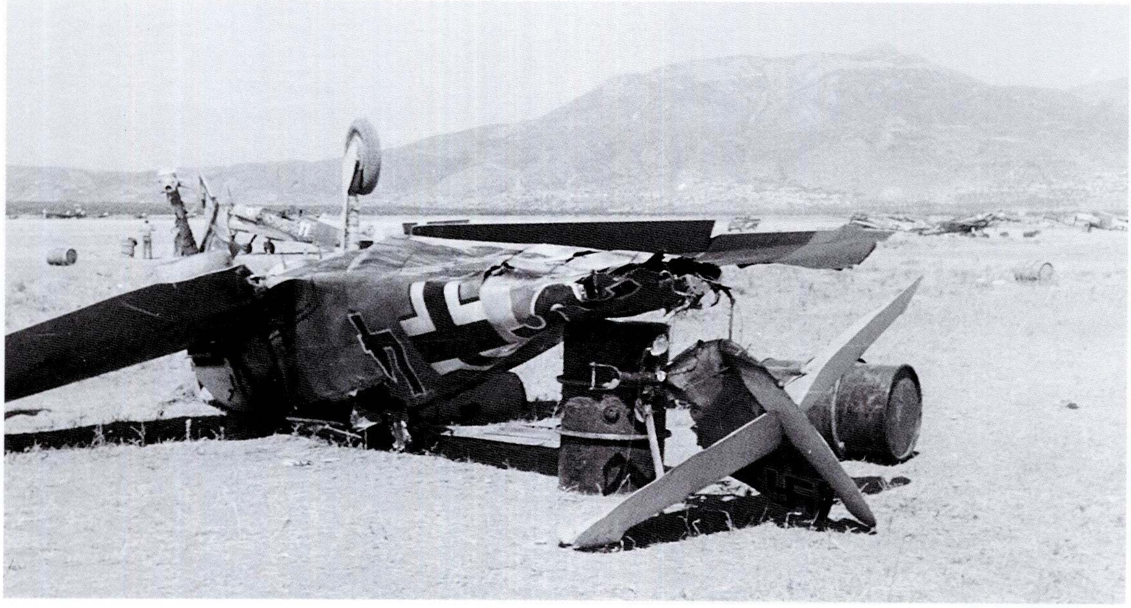


ABOVE AND RIGHT: During 'Merkur', II./JG 77 was withdrawn to rest and, in order to bolster the depleted III./JG 77, III./JG 52 moved from Bucharest to Molaoi but arrived only in the later stages of the conquest of Crete. Here, the machine flown by the Kommandeur of III./JG 52, Major Gotthard Handrick, is being inspected at Molaoi by members of the Greek Orthodox Church.

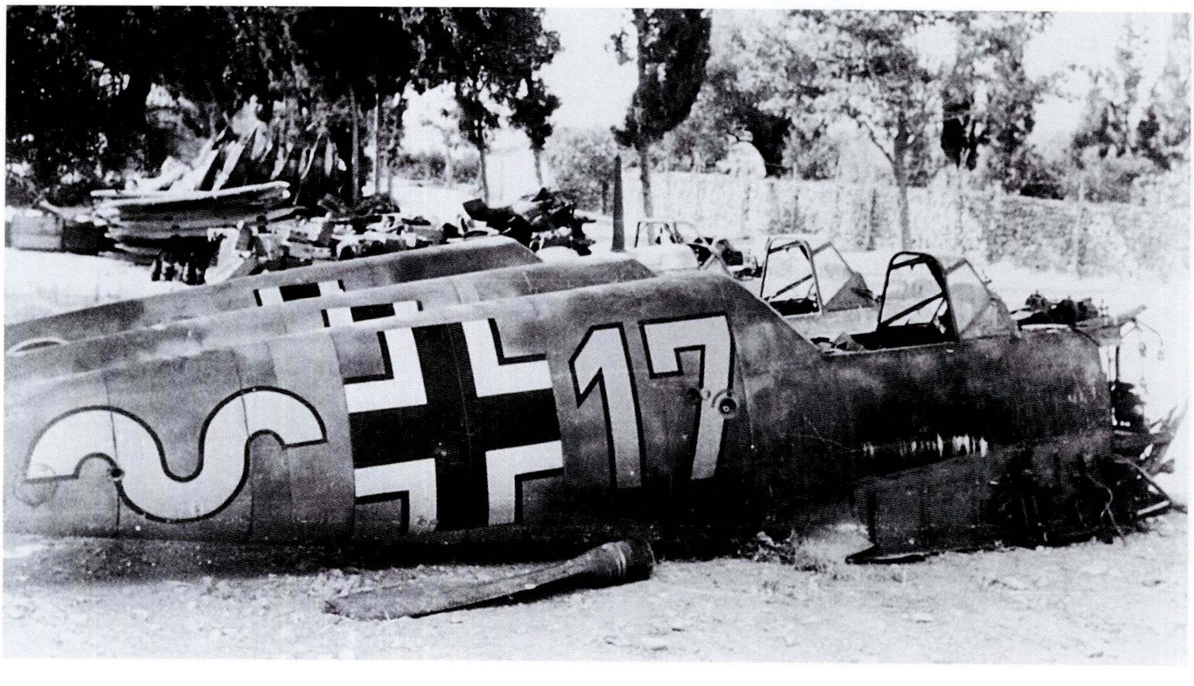




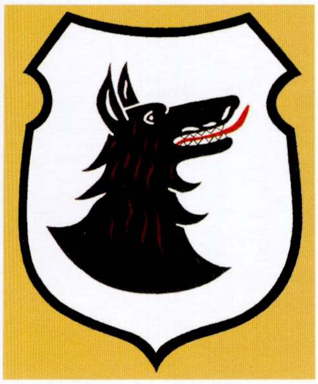
LEFT: 'Yellow 7' of 9./JG 52 was damaged in its port wing by ground fire and was subsequently further damaged in a heavy landing.



LEFT: A severely damaged aircraft of III./JG 77. The correct number of aircraft lost or damaged while serving with JG 77 during the Balkans campaign is not known as many went unrecorded in the official statistics.

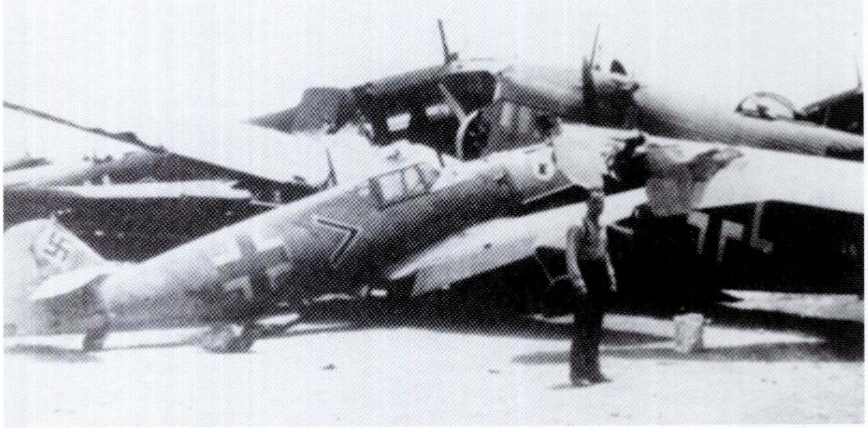


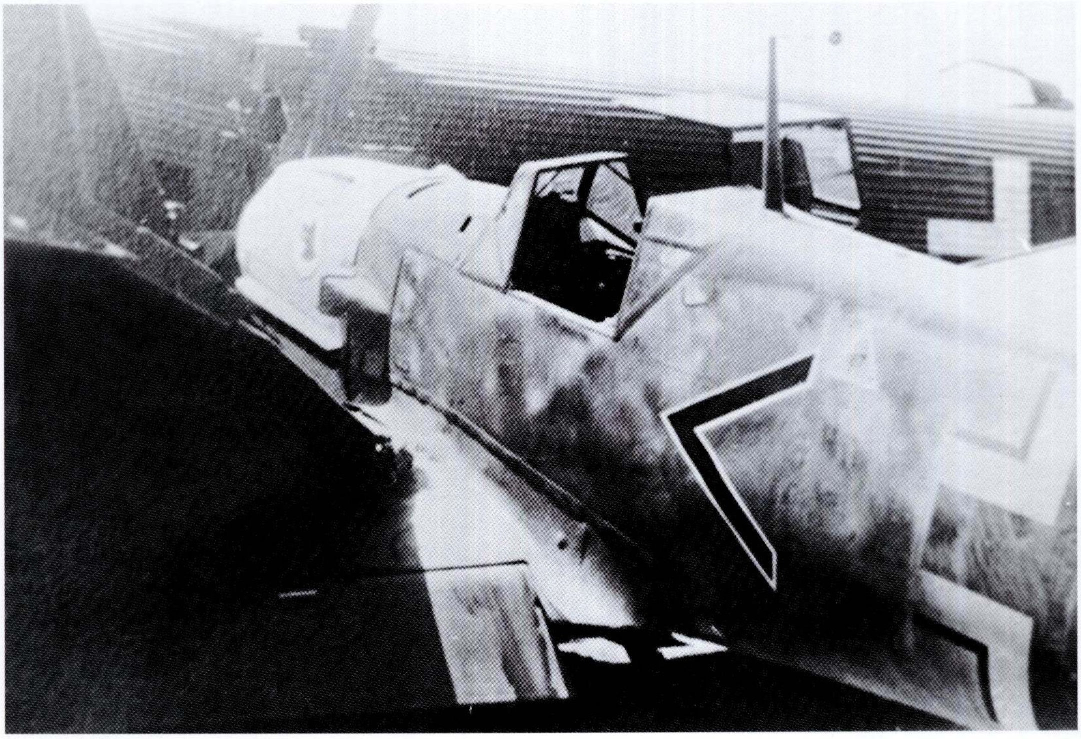
RIGHT: A collection of wrecked Bf 109s from JG 52 ready for scrapping. Note that the camouflage pattern on all three aircraft is virtually identical. Further views of 'Yellow 17' in a more airworthy condition may be found on Page 26.



III./JG 77 emblem

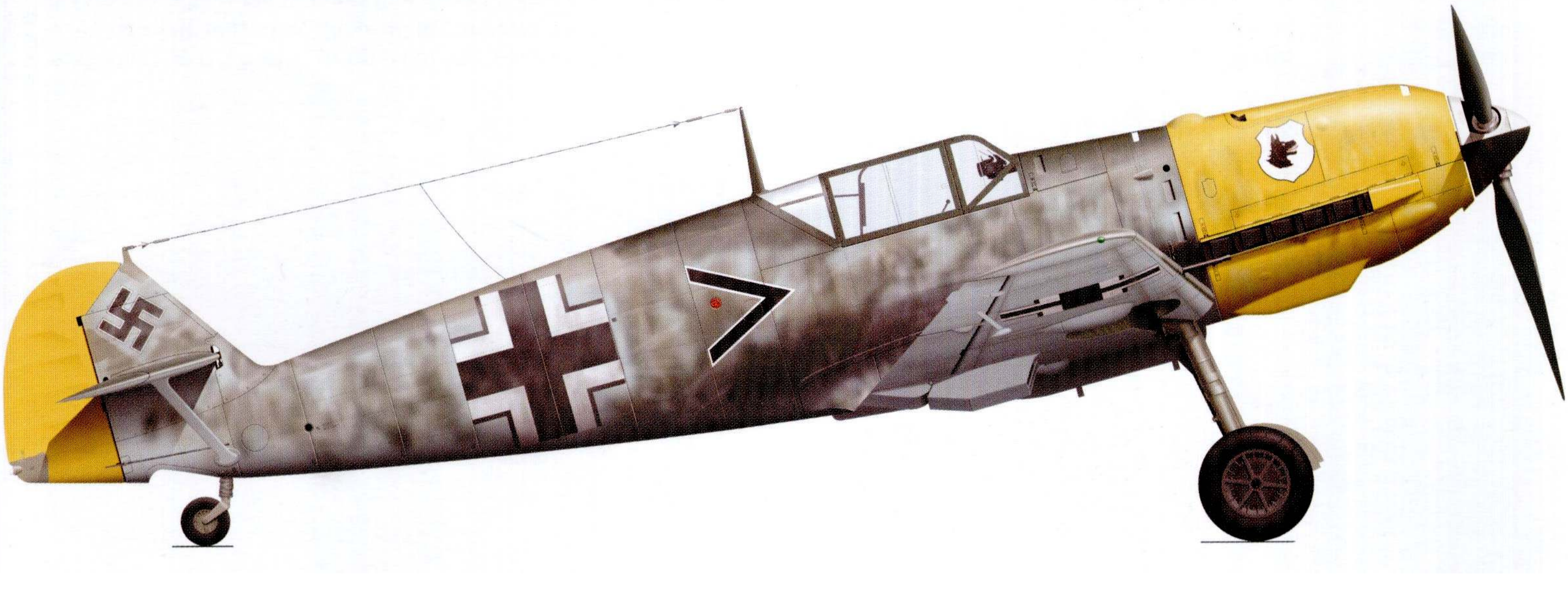
RIGHT AND BELOW: In the last days of the fighting on Crete, III./JG 77 was finally able to send a detachment to the island. Unfortunately, Lt. von Brentano of the Gruppen Stab taxied his Bf 109 E-7, W.Nr. 6399, into these wrecked Ju 52/3ms at Maleme. The pilot was unhurt but the aircraft damage was assessed at 60%.

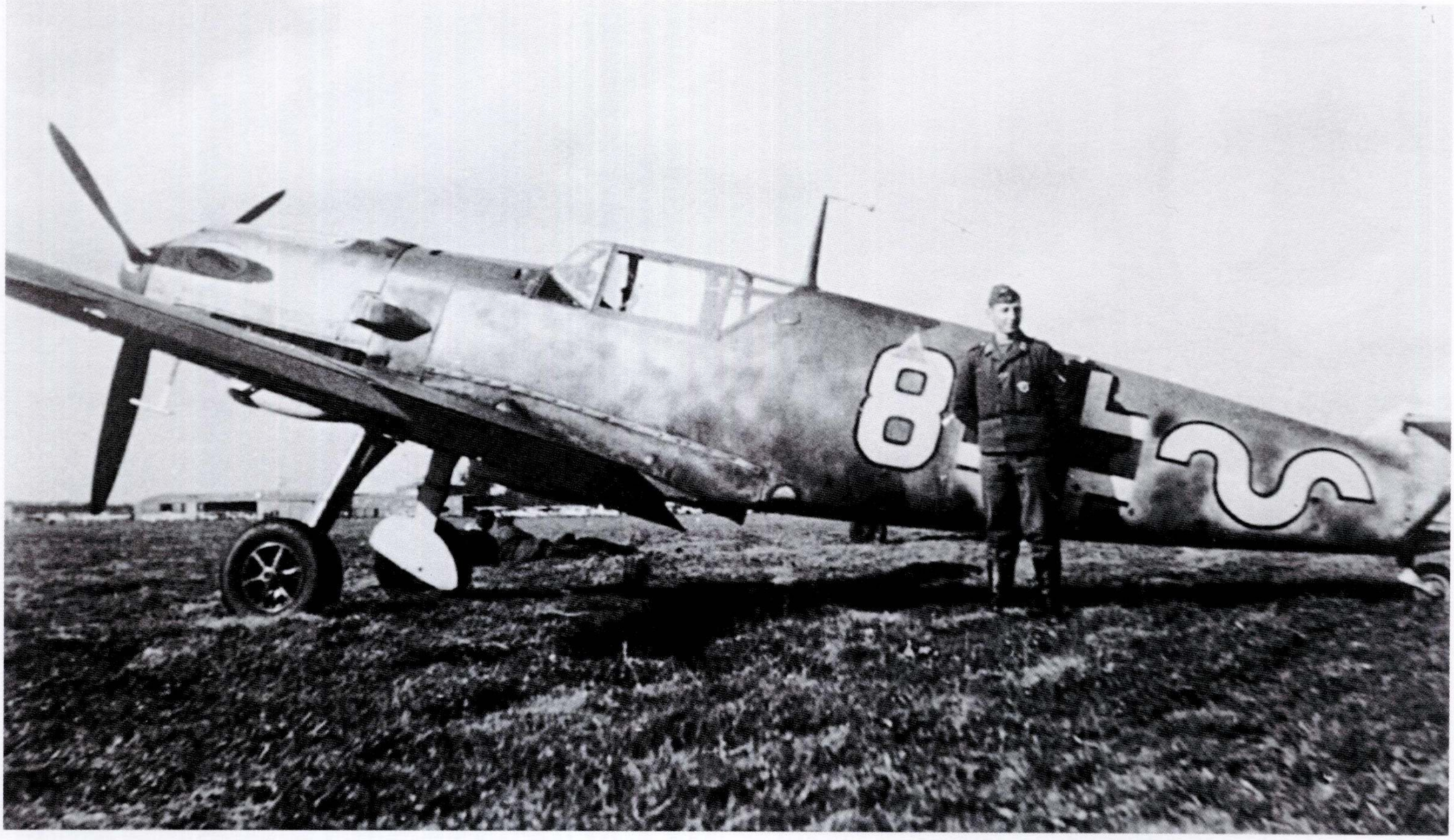




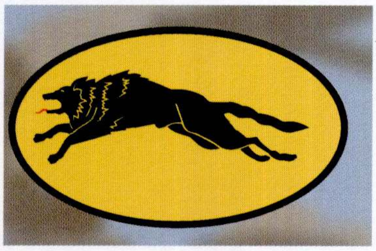
Messerschmitt Bf 109 E-7 flown by Lt. von Brentano of the Gruppen Stab of III./JG 77, Crete, May 1941

The camouflage on this aircraft, W.Nr. 6399, was applied in a splinter pattern on the uppersurface of the wings in the colours 71 and 02 with a dense mottle on the fuselage sides. The Stab chevron appeared new compared with the fuselage cross which was dusty and faded.





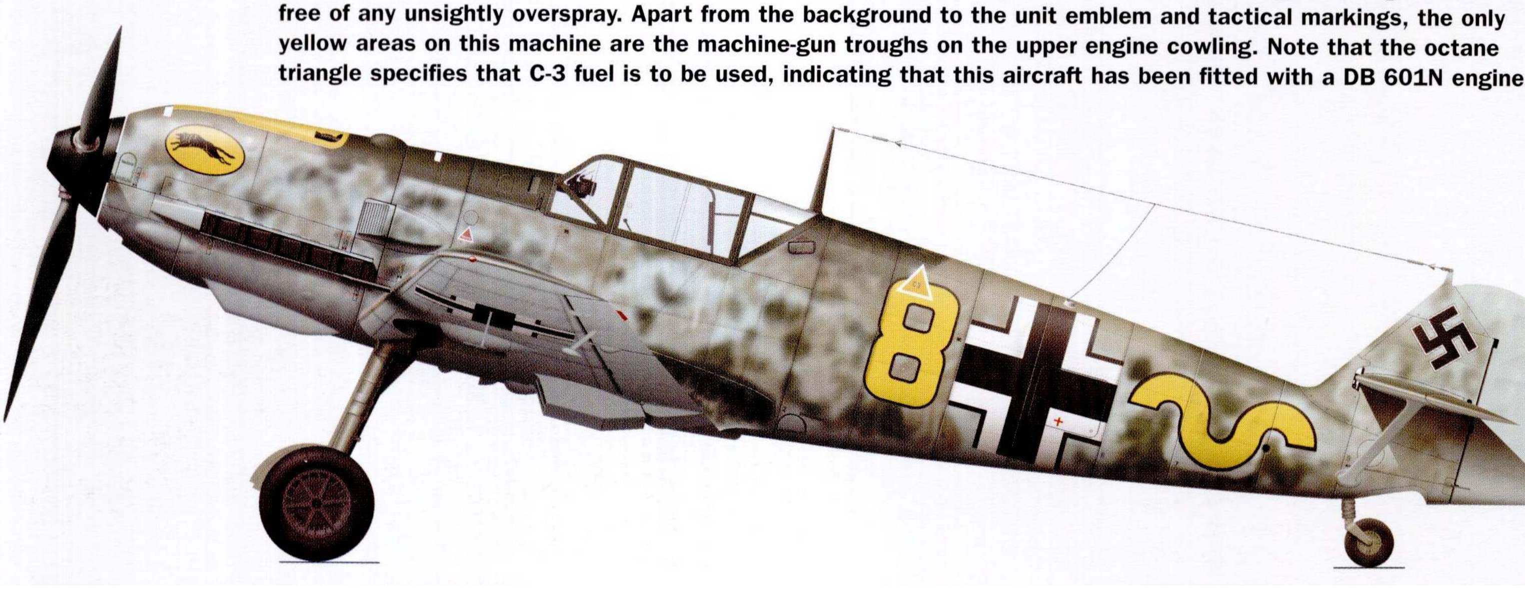
ABOVE: For a short while during the closing stages of the Balkans campaign, III./JG 52 operated over Crete. One of the most successful pilots of the unit was Leopold Steinbatz who joined 9./Staffel JG 52 in November 1940. Steinbatz distinguished himself in several Jabo attacks near Crete and is seen here posing with 'Yellow 8' of 9./JG 52, probably at the end of the campaign when his unit had returned to Rumania.

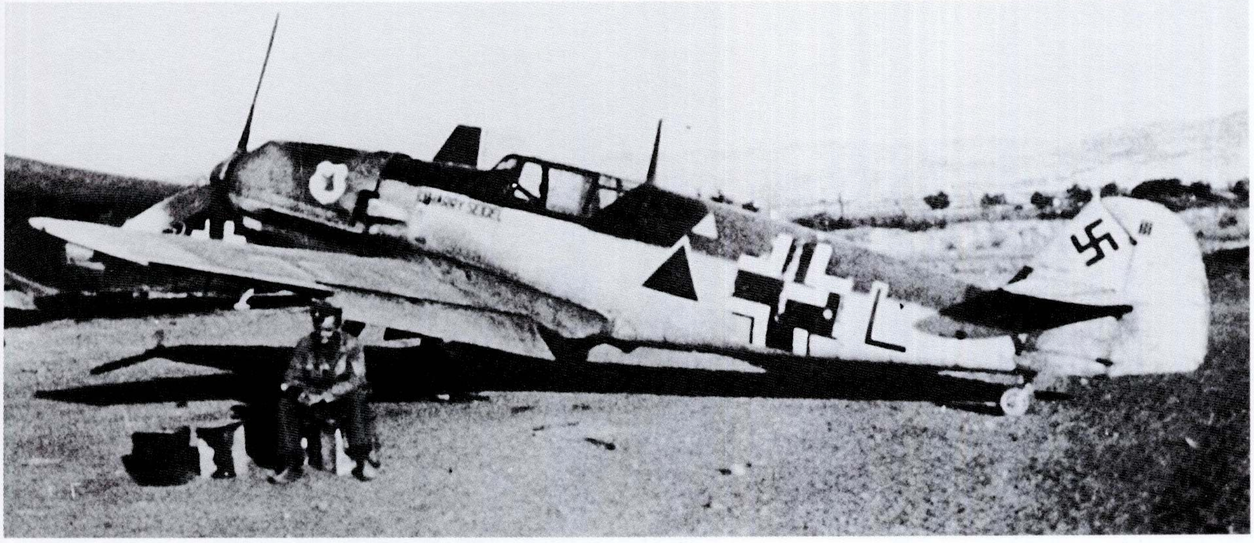


III./JG 52 emblem

Messerschmitt Bf 109 E-4 'Yellow 8' of III./JG 52, Rumania, May 1941

Unlike some of the weathered and worn aircraft shown elsewhere, the overall appearance of this machine, camouflaged in the colours 71/02/65, suggests that it is clean and well maintained. The fuselage mottling has evidently been applied neatly and uniformly and care has been taken to ensure the fuselage markings remained free of any unsightly overspray. Apart from the background to the unit emblem and tactical markings, the only yellow areas on this machine are the machine-gun troughs on the upper engine cowling. Note that the octane triangle specifies that C-3 fuel is to be used, indicating that this aircraft has been fitted with a DB 601N engine.

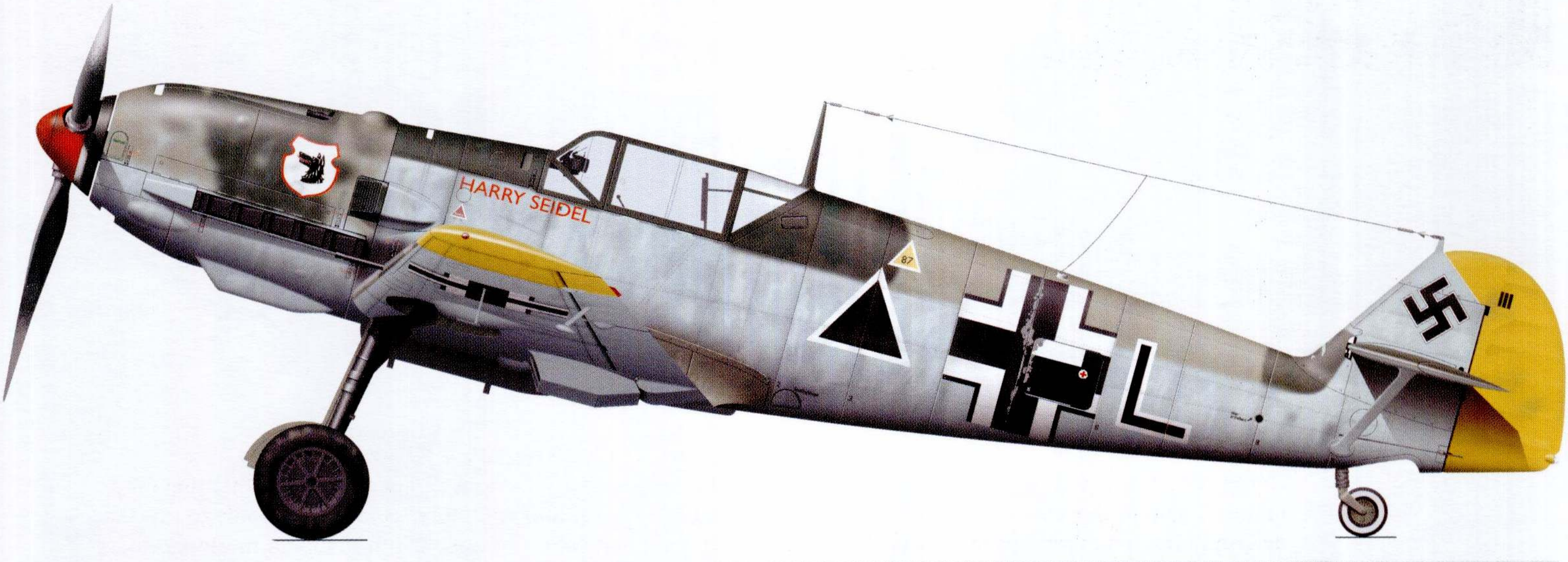


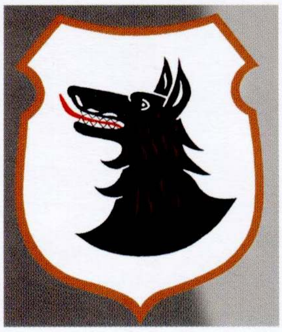


LEFT: This Bf 109 E-7 coded '+ L' clearly shows the markings of II.(Schlacht)/LG 2 but was operated by III./JG 77, the emblem of which was applied to the cowling. The name 'Harry Seidel' painted under the windscreen is in memory of Ofw. Albert Seidel of 5.(Schlacht)/LG 2, who was killed on 15 March 1941 during an operation against Britain when his Bf 109 E-7, another 'Black L', W.Nr. 3725, was shot down by Hurricanes and crashed into the sea.

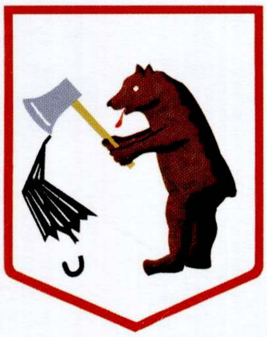
Messerschmitt Bf 109 E-7 of III./JG 77, Balkans, April 1941

Still displaying the fuselage markings of its previous owner, II.(Schlacht)/LG 2, and the name of a fallen comrade under the windscreen, this aircraft, finished in a 71/02/65 scheme, probably once had a yellow nose cowling bearing the badge of 5.(Schlacht)/LG 2. However, it has since been fitted with a camouflaged replacement cowling upon which is the badge of its later operator, III./JG 77. Although it is known that the wolf's head was sometimes in brown, or tan, it is believed that in this instance it was black and appears lighter in the accompanying photograph due to the effect of sunlight. A W.Nr., not legible in the photograph, was painted on the fin. Note that the tips of the propeller blades have worn back to natural metal and that the cover on the fuselage which provided access to the radio has been refitted upside down.

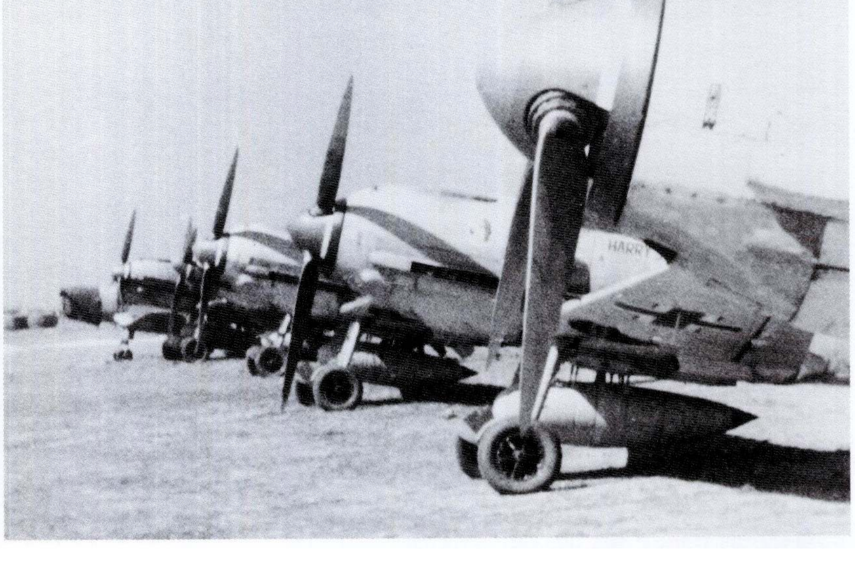




III./JG 77 emblem

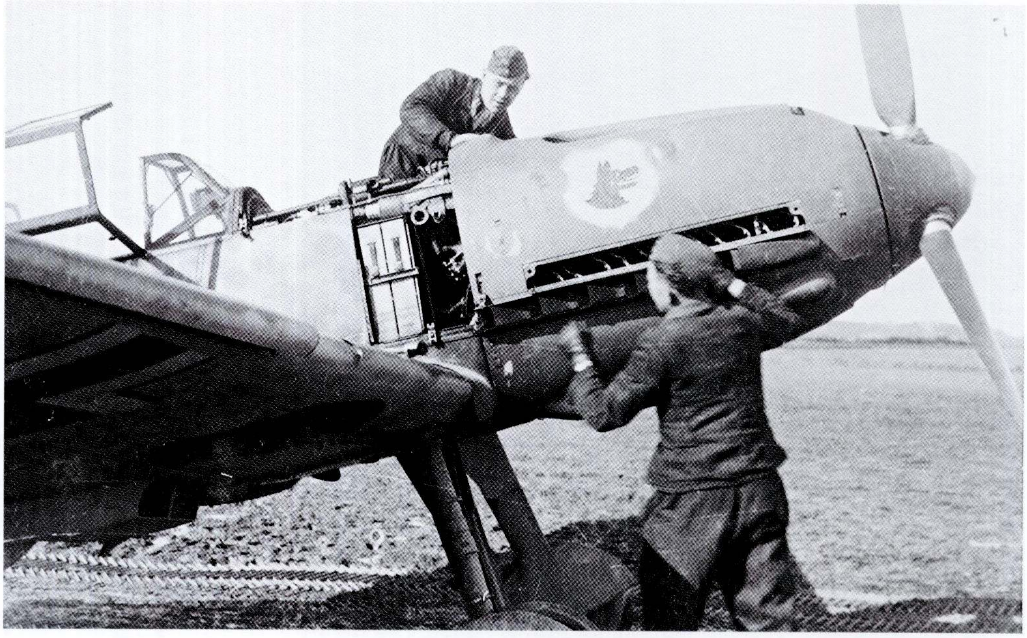


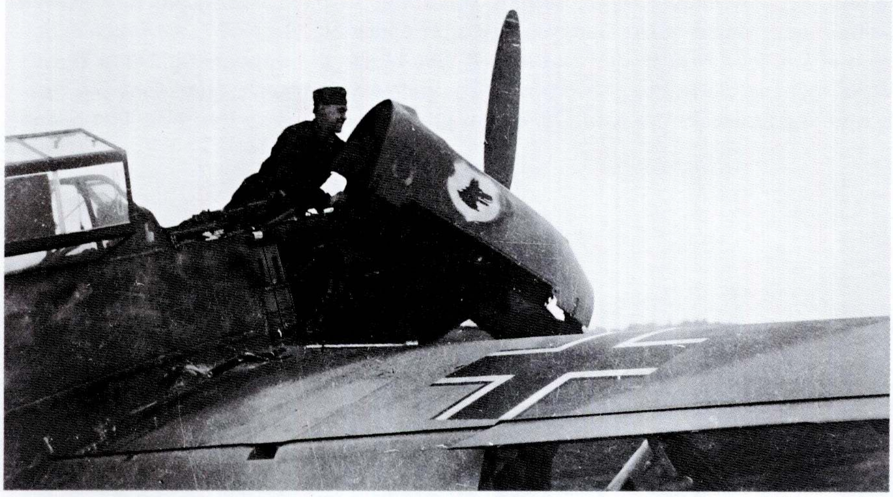
5.(Schlacht)/LG 2 emblem



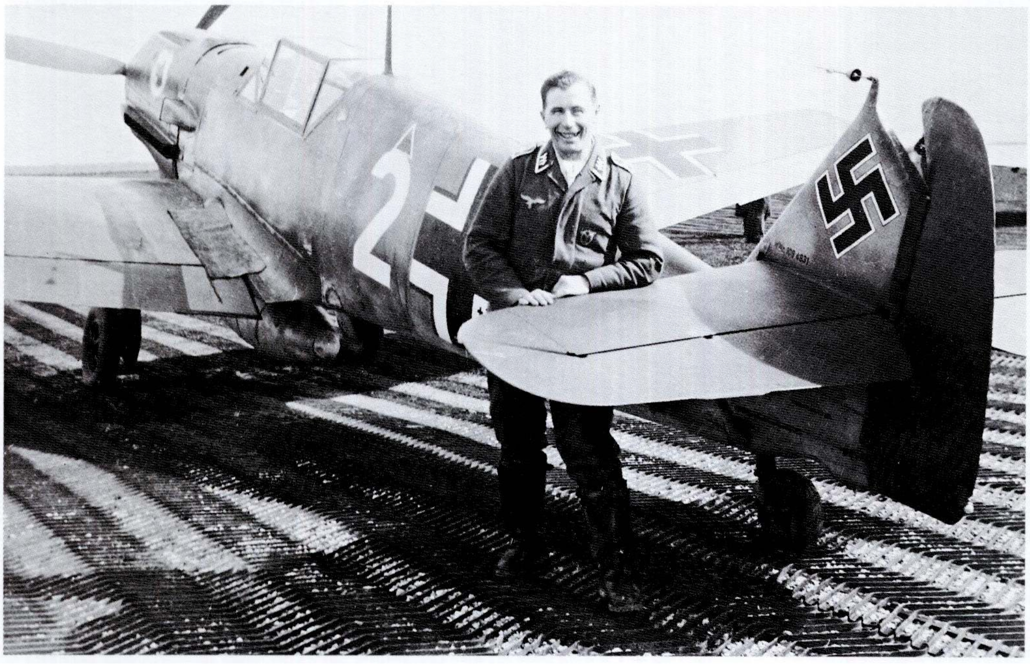
RIGHT: A line-up of aircraft from 5.(Schlacht)/LG 2 showing, second from the right, the Bf 109 E-7 named 'Harry Seidel'. This photograph, not taken in the Balkans, was probably taken in France in March 1941, shortly before the unit was transferred to Bulgaria.

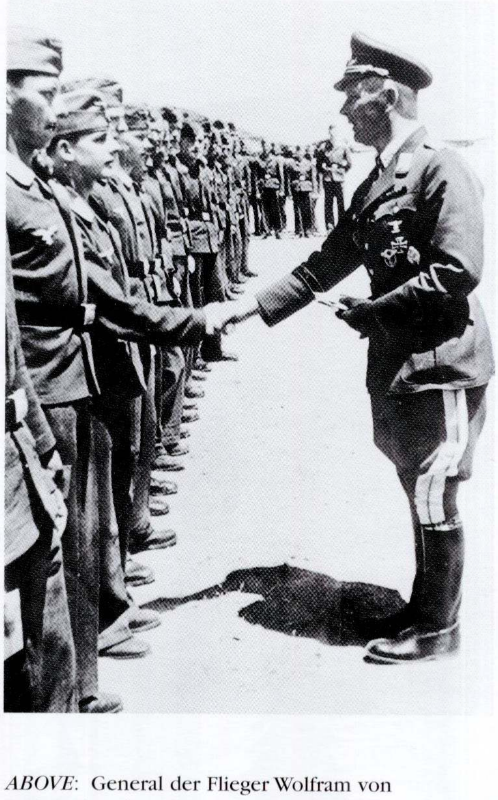
RIGHT AND BELOW: An aircraft of III./ JG 77 being serviced at Molaoi. Note again that the wolf's head badge is in tan with black detail.





BELOW: Fw. Johann Pichler of 7./JG 77 photographed at Molaoi with his Bf 109 E-7 'White 2', W.Nr. 109 4931. In this view, an auxiliary fuel tank is visible below the fuselage and the aircraft is standing on an area of pierced steel planking.





ABOVE: General der Flieger Wolfram von Richthofen, the officer commanding VIII. Fliegerkorps, awarding decorations, in this instance probably the EK II, to members of the Luftwaffe who participated in the invasion of Crete.

SQUADRON LEADER R. MARMADUKE PATTLE (SOUTH AFRICAN) DFC AND BAR, 80 SQN. AND 33 SQN., RAF

Although Marmaduke Pattle was undoubtedly the top-scoring Allied pilot of the Second World War, even today his exact number of victories is unknown, various sources crediting him with between 33 and 65 enemy aircraft confirmed destroyed in addition to others probably destroyed and damaged. What is remarkable, however, is that whichever is the correct number, it was achieved in just nine months of action.

Marmaduke Thomas St. John Pattle was born in Butterworth, Cape Province, on 3 July 1914, the son of English parents who had emigrated to South Africa. On leaving school in 1936, he joined the SAAF as a cadet but soon applied to join the RAF, which was recruiting in South Africa, and left for England in April 1936. After initial training at the Central Flying School, Prestwick, Pattle joined No. 10 Flying Training School in Shropshire, where he proved to be a well above average pilot and an exceptional marksman. In early 1937, Pattle was posted to No. 80 Fighter Squadron at Henlow which had recently received Gloster Gladiator I biplanes. At the end of April 1938, 80 Sqn. was posted to Ismailia in Egypt where, by mid-1939, Pattle was commanding 'B' Flight.

By August 1940, 80 Sqn. had moved up to Sidi Barrani, close to the Libyan border, and 'Pat' Pattle's first action occurred on 4 August when 'B' Flight was ordered to provide escort for a Lysander carrying out reconnaissance duties over the Libyan border. The Lysander was attacked by Italian fighters and in the ensuing fight, Pattle shot down a Breda 65 and a CR.42 but was himself forced to bale out. He walked to the Egyptian border where he was picked up by the British Army. Four days later, Pattle shot down two more CR.42s and, on 15 September, damaged an SM.79.

Although 80 Sqn. received its first Hurricane in June 1940, there was never enough to equip the whole squadron and, after operating for a while with both Gladiators and Hurricanes, the latter were eventually handed over to another unit in November and 80 Sqn. received Gladiator IIs. In early November, the squadron was ordered to Greece and made its first sorties from Trikkala on the 19th when Pattle was awarded two CR.42s. In December, Pattle's score continued to increase with two RO.37s destroyed on the 2nd and three CR.42s on the 4th. With a score of 11 confirmed, Pattle was awarded the DFC.

In February 1941, 80 Sqn. finally converted to Hurricanes and on the 9th Pattle claimed a CR.42. This was followed by a Cant Z.1007 and a BR.20 damaged on the 10th, and a G.50 destroyed on 20th. On the 27th he destroyed another CR.42, and in a series of engagements on the 28th he was credited with four CR.42s destroyed and a probable. In a number of sorties on 4 March, Pattle was credited with three G.50s destroyed and a CR.42 probably destroyed. Pattle was now awarded a Bar to his DFC and was posted to command 33 Sqn. which was also in Greece and equipped with Hurricanes. On 23 March he was credited with one G.50 confirmed shot down and one probable, plus three further G.50s destroyed on the ground.

On 6 April, the Germans invaded Greece and Greek and British forces were soon forced into retreat. The RAF continued to engage the German and Italian forces but conditions were chaotic and although Pattle's early claims were documented, many records were lost during the retreat. Thus, while many claims made during April received no official confirmation, it would seem that by the 20th his score had reached at least 50 including a Ju 88, a Bf 110, a number of Bf 109s, an He 111 and a Do 17.

On 18 April, 33 Sqn. moved to Eleusis in the south of Greece where it joined up with the remnants of Pattle's old 80 Sqn. By this time, the almost non-stop operations with only very short periods of rest were beginning to tell on his nerves. Apart from being both physically and mentally tired, he was also ill with influenza, suffering from a high temperature and bouts of shivering. Nevertheless, when in the afternoon of 20 April over 100 German and Italian aircraft were reported to be heading for Piraeus Harbour, Pattle insisted on flying. With their airfield under attack by Bf 110s, 15 Hurricanes, the remnants of 80 and 33 Sqns., now the only British fighters left in Greece, took off singly and, once in the air, managed to form up into small sections. Pattle, who had been lying shivering on a couch, covered with blankets, was the last to take off. He climbed and had positioned himself about 1,000 feet above a defensive circle of Bf 110s when he saw a lone Hurricane rising to attack from below. The Hurricane was flown by Plt. Off. W.J. Woods, who was unaware that a Bf 110 had detached itself from the circle and was diving to attack him. Pattle now dived to protect the Hurricane and, pulling up under the aircraft firing at Woods, shot it down in flames. Meanwhile, the circle of Bf 110s had broken up and the *Zerstörers* streamed down on Pattle's tail. In the ensuing fight Pattle is believed to have destroyed another Bf 110 and also a Bf 109 [1] but apparently fell victim to the superior number of enemy aircraft. His Hurricane was last seen falling in flames into Piraeus Harbour, the pilot slumped in the cockpit, still being fired at by two Bf 110s.

Because all official records of the last few weeks in Greece were destroyed, there is no authenticated confirmation of Pattle's total number of victories and his last official score is 23, as mentioned in the citation for his Bar to the DFC in March 1941. There is little doubt, however, that his true tally was much higher and that Pattle was the highest scoring pilot of the RAF and Commonwealth Air Forces.

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[1] Possibly that flown by Uffz. Fritz Borchert of III./JG 77.

WING COMMANDER EDWARD HOWELL OBE, DFC

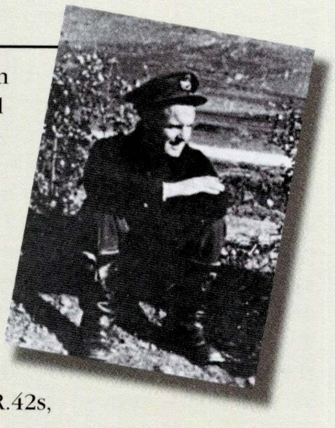
With the *Luftwaffe* already attacking Crete from the air, S/Ldr. Howell found himself the newly appointed CO of 33 Sqn. On 14 May, he climbed into the cockpit of a Hurricane at Maleme, hoping to disguise from his pilots the fact that he had never flown the type before. It was to be a baptism of fire, for on this day, the *Stab*, II. and III./JG 77 mounted an early morning, low-level attack with a total of 60 Bf 109s against Maleme airfield. As Howell sat in the cockpit attempting to acquaint himself with the controls, he saw his squadron's only other two serviceable Hurricanes suddenly roar off and get airborne. The next moment a flight of Bf 109s swept over the airfield and Howell took off through a formation of five of them which fired at him head-on. Fortunately, they all missed and once airborne, Howell tried to discover how to retract his undercarriage, how to switch on the gunsight, put the propeller into coarse pitch and turn on the firing button.

After flying about in a series of evasive manoeuvres, he at length succeeded in getting his guns to work and attacked two Bf 109s. The first machine attacked is believed to have been flown by *Uffz*. Willi Hagel of 4./JG 77, who crashed and was killed while landing at Molaoi. The official German loss report states that Hagel had been hit by flak, but Howell was credited with a victory. Howell then damaged the second Bf 109. Meanwhile, the other two Hurricanes had been shot down and, as it had been assumed that Howell had also been lost, when he returned to Maleme airfield with his ammunition exhausted, he was given a hero's welcome.

The next few days were a desperate time for the squadron. Reinforcements reached them spasmodically from Egypt, and new Hurricanes were put together by cannibalising damaged aircraft. Fleet Air Arm pilots also offered their services. Among further enemy aircraft accounted for by Howell were a Ju 52 transport and a Ju 87.

When the German airborne landings began on 20 May, there were no more serviceable aircraft available and Howell was told to put himself and his men under the command of the New Zealand infantry for the defence of the airfield. While patrolling the perimeter he was hit by a burst of sub-machine gun fire from a German paratrooper. His left shoulder was shattered, his right forearm badly injured, and he was left for dead. After several days lying in the open under the blazing Cretan sun, he was seen by six German paratroops who cared for him and placed him on a stretcher. In great pain, dehydrated, delirious and frequently unconscious, Howell was eventually loaded into a Ju 52 for evacuation to Athens. "Later," he recalled, "the incongruity of it all struck me. One day shooting down a Junkers 52, and a few days later travelling in one as a passenger."

FLIGHT LIEUTENANT WILLIAM 'TIMBER' WOODS (BRITISH) DFC, RAF



William Joseph 'Timber' Woods was born of Irish parents in 1913. He received his RAF commission in January 1938 and by the beginning of 1940 was serving as a Flying Officer with the Station Flight at Hal Far, Malta. As the threat of Italy entering the war grew, he was one of a number of pilots selected to form the Fighter Flight which was set up at Kalafrana with a handful of Sea Gladiators.

When the initial Italian attack was made on 11 June 1940, Woods made the first claim over the island. He first opened fire on different SM.79s but without any apparent results before being attacked by an MC.200. Getting in a good, full deflection burst, Woods saw the MC.200 enter a step dive pouring black smoke. He was unable to follow it but believed it to have crashed into the sea and was credited accordingly with a probable. In fact, the MC.200 was not seriously damaged and Woods had been misled by its evasive actions and heavy black exhaust smoke.

On 28 June Woods intercepted two SM.79s and was credited with the destruction of one of them, but although the bomber was heavily damaged, the pilot succeeded in returning to his base. On the morning of 7 July, the Malta fighters were scrambled to intercept two formations, each of five SM.79s escorted by nine CR.42s, heading for the harbour at Valletta. In the ensuing battle, Woods shot down one of the SM.79s.

Woods was again in action during the morning of 31 July 1940 when he is believed to have shot down the CR.42 flown by *Capitano* Antonio Chiodi, the commander of the 75a *Squadriglia*, whose aircraft crashed into the sea east of Grand Harbour. In August, Woods was among a number of pilots incorporated into 261 Sqn. and he was flying with this squadron on 17 September when he scored his last victory over Malta, another CR.42. The aircraft dived into a field and exploded, the wreckage smouldering for several hours. The Italian pilot, who had baled out, stated during interrogation that an oil feed line had burst and he had baled out, fearing his machine would catch fire, but the victory was nevertheless credited to Woods.

Awarded a DFC in January 1941, Woods was posted to Egypt and then on to 80 Sqn. in Greece where he became a flight commander. On 20 January, Woods was with a detachment from 80 Sqn. based at Eleusis for the defence of Athens, when his five Gladiators were ordered off to intercept Italian Cant Z.1007 bombers approaching from the west. Unable to reach the first formation, the Gladiators, with Woods leading, attacked a second. Together with other members of the squadron, Woods made two attacks on one of the big, three-engined bombers which was seen to burst into flames and crash into the sea south of Athens. For this he was credited with a shared victory.

On 10 February, shortly before returning to Egypt to ferry one of the squadron's first Hurricanes back to Greece, Woods was credited with a share in damaging a BR.20 bomber over Yanina. On 20 February, Woods was flying one of eight Gladiators from 80 Sqn. which, together with nine others from 112 Sqn., flew to Paramythia to intercept an Italian formation and in the ensuing battle he claimed the destruction of a Fiat G.50.

On 20 April, Woods is believed to have taken off on several sorties and, in one engagement, he became involved in a dogfight over Eleusis Bay. He made a climbing attack against a group of circling Bf 110s but one had, however, already broken away from the circle and began to fire at Woods' aircraft. This Bf 110 was attacked and destroyed by Woods' squadron commander, Marmaduke Pattle, an action in which Pattle lost his life. Woods is then believed to have destroyed two of the Bf 110s but, either in this or another fight later in the day, was himself shot down and killed in Hurricane V7852.

Notes on Camouflage and Markings during the Balkans Campaign

Throughout the Balkans campaign, *Luftwaffe* fighter camouflage remained unchanged from the late Battle of Britain period. Predominantly, this comprised Blue 65 undersurfaces with all horizontal uppersurfaces finished either in a splinter scheme of Green 71 and Grey 02, or two shades of locally mixed grey which often closely resembled the later Greys 74 and 75 which, within a matter of months, would become standard. Any variations in camouflage schemes used in the Balkans were therefore largely due to the skill or preference of the aircraft painters and consisted mainly of the same basic combination of mottles, stripes and segments which had been used during the Battle of Britain. Thus it was the density and shape of mottles which mainly varied, some aircraft having only a light misting of Grey 02 over the Blue 65, while others had quite heavy applications of Grey 02, Green 71, or both, sometimes in quite elaborate patterns.

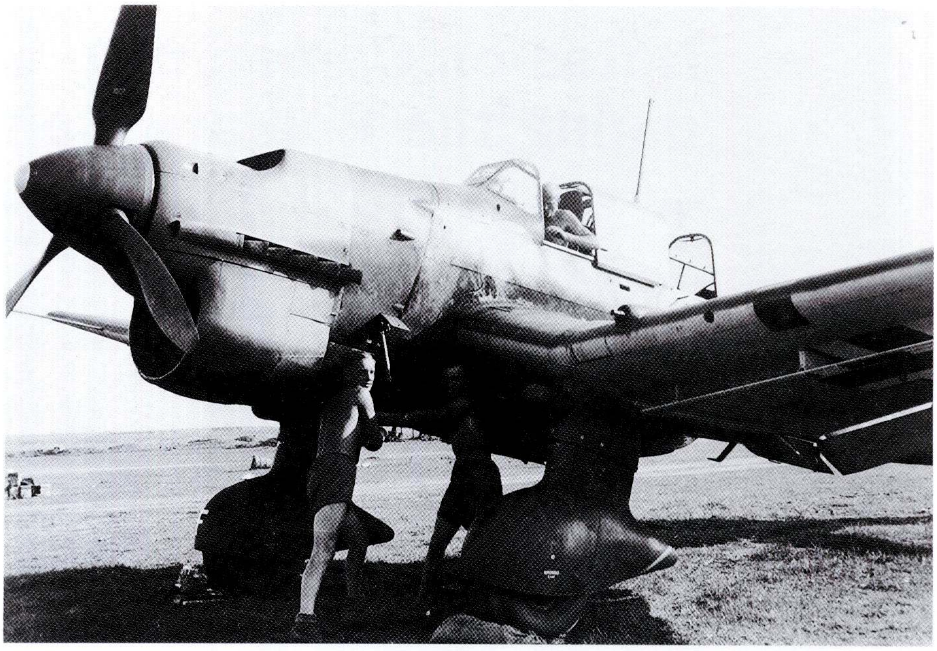
Often, the particular style of some schemes had features so distinctly characteristic that, even when no unit badges are visible, it is still sometimes possible from the camouflage scheme alone to identify with some accuracy the unit to which a particular aircraft belonged. In JG 52, for example, combat attrition had led to the III. *Gruppe* being withdrawn fairly early from the Battle of Britain and at some time, either while recuperating in Germany or, perhaps, after the *Gruppe* had later transferred to bases in Rumania, the aircraft were overhauled and repainted. Photographs of 9./JG 52's aircraft from this period show quite clearly that, unlike the mixture of finishes observed during the Battle of Britain, there was thence a distinct similarity in camouflage throughout the individual *Staffeln.**

Further clues to the identity of an aircraft's parent unit are also sometimes provided by the style of numbering used for the fuselage codes. Again to take 9./JG 52 as an example, the style of numbering used is not only distinctive but consistent with a single set of stencils having been used to mark this unit's aircraft.

As mentioned in the main text, both before and during the Balkans campaign there was a number of instances when aircraft from one unit, perhaps re-equipping for operations in Russia, were handed on to another which was due to participate in *'Marita'* or, later, which had been depleted by combat attrition. Thus we find that aircraft from JG 54 and II.(*Schlacht*)/LG 2 – the former characterised by a segmented scheme of Grey 02 patches interspersed with meandering Green 71 lines over the basic Blue 65, the latter by a black equilateral triangle – were passed over to JG 77 which then added its own insignia to those already in place. Similarly, such was the rate of attrition in the Balkans that repair and maintenance centres were obliged to send refurbished aircraft to the area so urgently that they arrived still with their original unit emblems, code numbers and camouflage intact. This is particularly evident in photographs of aircraft originally on the strength of JG 2, a unit which did not operate in the Balkans, which show either this *Geschwader's* typical stippled green over Blue 65 finish or the unmistakable script 'R' emblem of the *'Richthofen' Geschwader.*

It should also be pointed out that while the wolf's head badge of III./JG 77 is invariably depicted in black, some of the photographs in this book show quite unmistakably that it was sometimes painted in brown. This practice was perhaps far more widespread than is generally appreciated and is known to have continued long after the Balkans campaign since some aircraft of III./JG 77 found in Tunisia in mid-1943 were described in RAF A.I.2.(g) Crash Reports as having a brown "bulls" *(sic)* head.

As for the increased use of yellow as an aid to the identification of friendly aircraft, although no relevant order or instruction for this development has yet been located, photographs taken during the Balkans campaign show such a uniform proliferation of yellow that undoubtedly some directive on this subject was issued. Whatever the wording of these instructions, the varying use of the colour shows they were obviously subject to fairly wide interpretation. The standard yellow cowlings, rudders and wingtips, which so characterised the fighter and destroyer aircraft of the Battle of Britain period, were now applied to virtually all aircraft taking part in *'Marita'* including Do 17s, Ju 87s, Ju 88s and Bf 110s and, additionally, some of these types as well as certain Bf 109s are known to have had yellow elevators. The Balkans campaign also marked the first use of the yellow fuselage bands subsequently used in Russia, but these again were the subject of some variation in width and position, and at least one instance has been recorded of a Bf 109 having a band applied in what appears to have been yellow chalk. Also noted was the not infrequent use of a narrow yellow trailing-edge strip along the full span of each wing from the yellow tips to the wing root. The exact significance of this is not presently understood but may have been associated with the aircraft flown

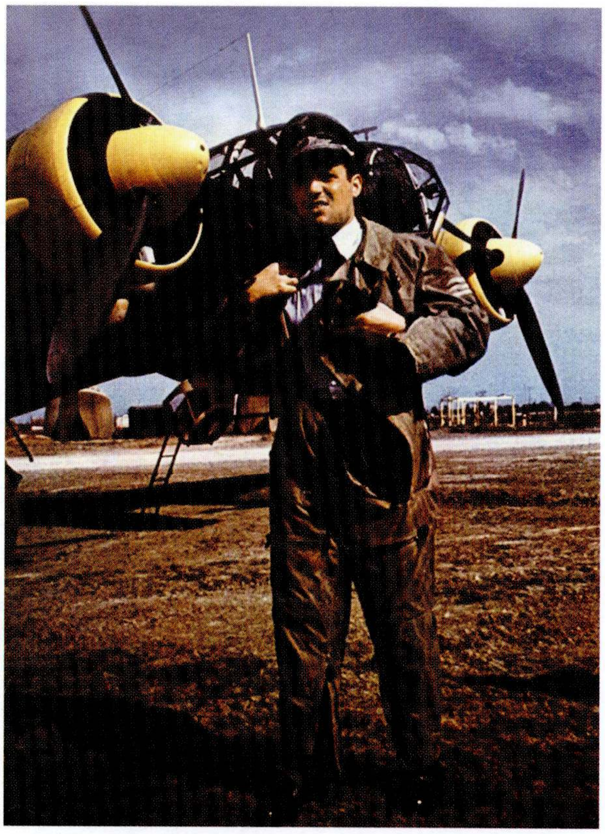


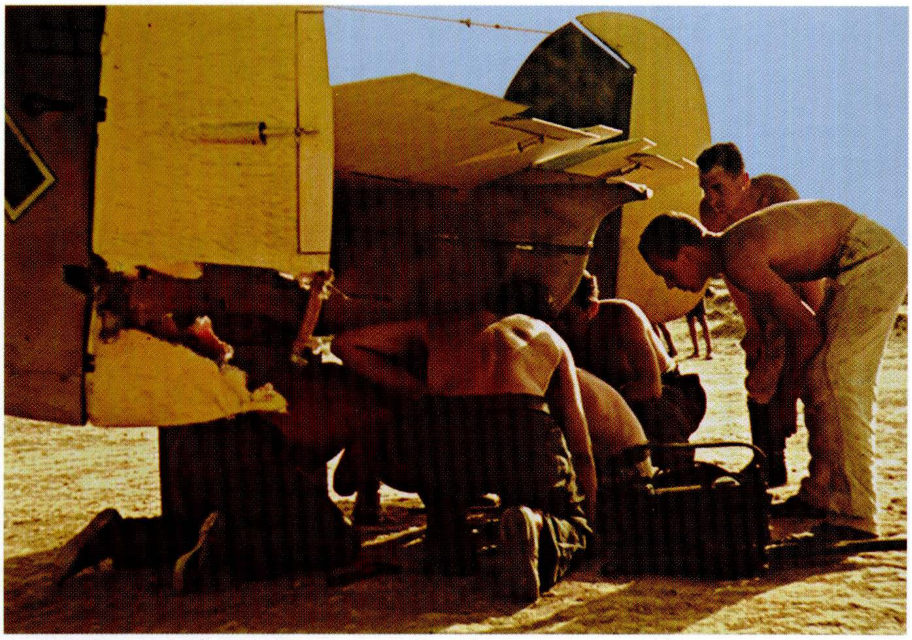
by a formation (*Gruppe*, *Staffel* or *Schwarm*) leader.

It should be appreciated that many of the photographs in this book were taken in conditions of bright sunlight which, depending on the position of the sun relative to the particular angle or curvature of an aircraft's surface, can cause colours to appear misleadingly different than they were. Additionally, replacement aircraft delivered throughout the campaign came from Northern Europe where climatic conditions were different from those in the Balkans. The age of these machines when they were transferred, together with the length of time they were exposed to the sun and heat of the Balkans, are therefore additional factors which would have caused further variations in the degrees of weathering and fading.

All these variables have been carefully considered during the preparation of the colour profiles which accompany this work and which have, therefore, been finalised by examining any known constants; the Green 70 of propeller blades or the black of a Balkenkreuz, for example, proved particularly useful in this respect. Inevitably, however, many of the profiles are based on personal interpretation and may not agree with the reader's perception. Similarly, where available photographs do not show all the details required, educated assumptions have been made in order to show the aircraft's probable appearance, and in such instances readers are therefore invited to draw their own conclusions. Indeed, it is to aid readers in their own evaluation that, while attempting to describe colours as accurately as possible in our captions, we always show one or, whenever possible, several photographs of the particular machines profiled.

THIS PAGE: German aircraft photographed during the Balkans campaign showing the large areas of yellow applied for identification purposes. On Ju 87s (*RIGHT*), this included the entire forward engine cowling and radiator intake, and while a yellow rudder was usual, yellow elevators and even the entire tail assembly have also been noted. (*BELOW RIGHT*) Ju 88s had yellow engine cowlings. (*BELOW LEFT*) This Bf 110 of the long-range reconnaissance Staffel 7.(F)/LG 2 being repaired displays yellow rudders and elevators.





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* See photograph at bottom of Page 88.